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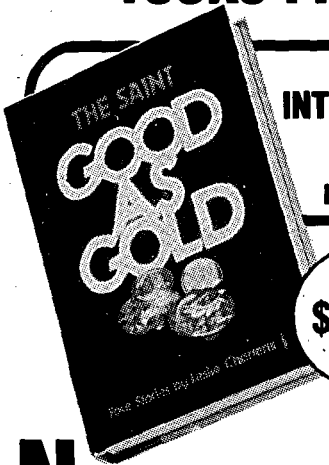

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VOLUME 25, NO. 13 DECEMBER 15, 1980

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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December 15, 1980

Dear Reader:

"Why do people get murdered?" models' agent Betty Paris asks in this issue's novelette, "Girls and Boys Together." Conversely, one could ask the question, "Why do people commit murder?" As the result of some obsession—jealousy, hate, greed, revenge, ambition, political ideology? Or out of fear perhaps, or self-defense, some inner rage, the hope for peace of mind, or because of simple madness?

To one of these various motives for murder, a writer need add only one of the many opportunities and one of the diverse means available to his or her murderer in order to create his own unique murder mystery. This issue contains 8 distinctive cases of murder plus one case of extremely malicious mischief, all demanding sharp scrutiny by you, our observant readers.

Observant as you are, however, we wonder how you will score on Peter Christian's Alfred Hitchcock Photoquiz on pages 65-96, a special feature celebrating not only the remarkable career of Alfred Hitchcock on the silver screen but also the silver anniversary of *AHMM*.

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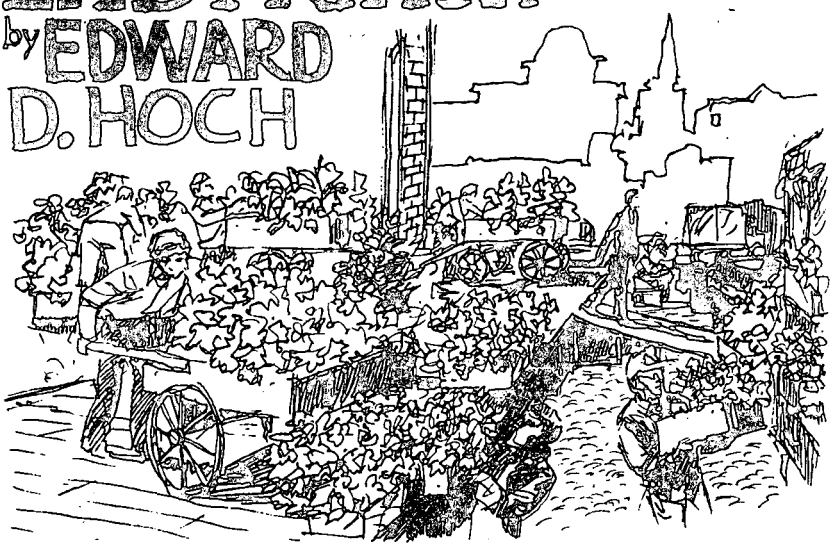
Minotaur had eluded the police of six countries . . .

ASSIGNMENT: LABYRINTH

by EDWARD D. HOCH



It was the first time Charles Spacer had ever been inside the huge auction room of the Aalsmeer flower market outside Amsterdam, and he was impressed.

The desks for the bidders were arranged in tiers that reached to the ceiling, reminding him of the lecture hall of a great university. Each desk could accommodate two bidders, and was equipped with goose-necked microphones and buttons to record their bids.

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"You are familiar with our so-called Dutch auction?" Jakob Weevers asked as he led Charles through the empty auction room.

"Not really," Spacer replied, hurrying to keep up with the slim man's rapid pace. "My field is electronics. I'm interested in your equipment rather than your methods."

"Ah, yes, Conco International," Weevers remarked. Spacer couldn't tell if the name was pronounced with approval or disdain. He'd encountered both reactions many times during his years in Europe for the American firm.

"Naturally I'll be interested in learning anything I can about your operations," he said.

"The large flower carts are wheeled in through that opening at the far end of the hall. The buyers here—perhaps as many as two thousand in a single day—range from local stall-owners to worldwide exporters. Prices for each lot of cut flowers or potted plants start high and are progressively lowered by the auctioneer. The big computerized clock devices on the front wall here indicate the current offering prices. We have two price clocks so that two lots can be bid on simultaneously. The first bidder to press the button on his desk stops the clock and is recorded as the purchaser of the lot being offered."

"Fascinating," Charles Spacer murmured. "And your computerized equipment uses Conco parts?"

"Of course." Weevers ran a hand through his thin blond hair. "These units beneath the price clocks instantly register the bidder's number and the offering price at which he bid."

They had reached the far end of the hall. Through the wide doorway Spacer could see rows of flower carts awaiting the start of the day's auction. "I appreciate the tour, Mr. Weevers. As you know, I'm new to the Amsterdam office, and this gives me a better idea of your operations here. I'll be calling on other Conco customers in the coming weeks."

"We are the first?"

"Yes."

Jakob Weevers smiled. "An honor, surely." Again, Spacer felt there might be irony in his tone, though he couldn't be sure. "Do you wish to stay and observe an auction?"

"That would be interesting," Spacer admitted. "But first I must make a call back to the office."

"Use my phone upstairs."

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"I have one in the car. It's closer."

"As you wish. Come back to the auction room when you are finished."

Spacer left the building through the loading dock and walked quickly across a wide parking lot filled with every manner of arriving vehicle. There were small vans and pickup trucks side by side with great tractor trailers ready to carry shipments of flowers throughout western Europe, some of which would be sold in Paris and London before nightfall.

Inside the powder-blue limousine that was one of the fringe benefits of being a Conco branch manager, Spacer settled back and lifted the telephone receiver. He punched out a number he'd memorized only that morning and waited while the wireless system transmitted his signal.

Presently the phone on the other end was answered by a voice that said merely, "Dimitri."

Charles Spacer replied with one word. "Labyrinth."

"Have you made contact?"

"Yes."

"Do you need assistance?"

"Not at this time."

"Keep us informed."

"I will," Spacer promised, and broke the connection.

He hung up the phone, left the limousine, and walked back to the Aalsmeer flower market.

It had started three days earlier with a visit from Colman King. The man had a way of materializing in Spacer's life whenever certain people in Washington felt the need of a specialist for a particular assignment. Spacer often thought of himself as leading a double life, devoting part of his time to his European travels on behalf of Conco International while the rest of it was given over to the sort of intrigues most men only read or dream about. It was a life he wouldn't have traded for any other. Even when he'd been shot at in an Athens alley he'd had no regrets.

"What is it this time?" he'd asked King as they shared a seat on one of the glass-enclosed sightseeing launches that cruised the canals and waterways of Amsterdam.

"A simple matter."

"I'll bet."

King removed his glasses and began to polish them casually. "Are you familiar with a terrorist called Minotaur?"

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"By reputation only. His depredations are quite impressive."

"Washington has decided it's time he was neutralized. We want you to find him for us."

"Wait a minute. I don't go around killing off terrorists, for you or anyone else—especially not one with a reputation like Minotaur's."

"Who said we wanted you to kill him? Simply identify him. We'll handle whatever else needs to be done."

"So far he's avoided the police of six countries. Where do you suggest I start looking?"

"Our word is that he is connected somehow with the Aalsmeer flower market southwest of the city. He's using the daily flower auctions there for some purpose, but we don't know what."

"Do you have any idea what he looks like?" Spacer asked.

"No. We're not even certain whether Minotaur is a man or a woman, but a man seems more likely. He's been operating for about five years now, in various countries, for various crackpot causes. I suppose he's a madman—this generation's Jack the Ripper, in a sense."

"Who do I contact at the flower market?"

"A man named Jakob Weevers is in charge. They use sophisticated electronic equipment which almost certainly contains some Conco parts. That gives you a reason for the visit. Remember, it's important to keep us advised of your contacts at all times."

Spacer nodded. "So that someone else can pick up the trail if I'm killed?"

"We have to be practical, Charles. The man you're seeking is a killer."

"Of course."

"Report by telephone to this number. Use your car phone to avoid tapped wires. A man named Dimitri will answer. He can be trusted, and he'll back you up on the scene when needed."

"What code word should I use?"

Colman King considered that for a moment. Then he answered, "Labyrinth. After all, that's where minotaurs are found."

Jakob Weevers was speaking quickly to the loaders lounging by their flower carts in the reception hall as Spacer returned. "Move that bicycle out of the way," he told one man, speaking in Dutch. Then he turned to Spacer and switched to English. "They ride their bicycles to work and leave them everywhere. It is a safety hazard."

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"We may have that problem in America if the price of gasoline continues to climb."

"Did you make your phone call?"

"Yes. Now I'd like to watch the auction for a bit, if I may."

"Certainly. Come this way." Almost at once they encountered a muscular middle-aged man with dark curly hair. Weevers introduced them. "Charles Spacer of Conco International. This is our chief of security, Rudolph Hepps."

The man's handshake was a powerful grip, and Spacer almost winced. "I'm pleased to meet you. What does the chief of security do at a flower auction?"

Rudolph Hepps smiled as if he'd heard the question before. "The flowers you see are worth tens of thousands of guilders. They are here for hours before the auction, and then there is a great bustle to get them on the buyers' trucks and off to market. It would be easy, without proper security, for a trucker to make off with flowers or plants which are not his."

"Of course," Spacer agreed. "One thinks of security in connection with jewelry or bank vaults, but even flowers have their value."

Weevers had left them as the sounds from inside announced the beginning of the morning's auction. "Even with the best security," Hepps continued, "some loss is inevitable. I try to keep it to a minimum by knowing all the dealers and truckers and growers personally. That way I can spot a stranger."

Charles Spacer nodded. It was the essence of all good counterintelligence—the ability to spot the stranger. "How many people are employed here?"

"Oh, upwards of fifty. And we have some part-time cleaning crews and the like."

Spacer was beginning to think it might be very much like a labyrinth if he attempted to find a link to Minotaur here. "Thank you, Mr. Hepps. I'll be going in for the auction now."

Rudolph Hepps waved his hand. "Let me know if I can be of help."

Spacer climbed the tiers of seats in the auction hall until he found an unoccupied desk near the top. Careful to keep his hands away from the bidding buttons, he settled back to watch. Once, years ago, he'd attended a tobacco auction in Virginia, and the rapid chanting of the auctioneer had remained in his memory as somehow emblematic of all auctions. But

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nothing could be more of a contrast than the action at Aalsmeer. As new flower carts were rolled in and positioned beneath the giant price clocks, the single hands jumped to the highest position and began their slow sweep of the dial while a digital readout kept track of the constantly changing offering price. At first, as the price dropped, the spectators paid little attention. One near Spacer was actually browsing through a French newspaper. But after half a minute he could feel the tension increasing. Men and the few women leaned forward. One man picked up the recessed telephone on his desk.

Suddenly someone pressed the desk button and it was all over. The two carts of potted plants had been sold, and attention shifted to the other price clock.

That was when Spacer's wandering eyes caught sight of the young woman in the red dress. She was operating one of the two computer consoles beneath the price clock to the right, and with the conclusion of that auction she rose quickly from her seat and came out from around her counter. She seemed to be trying to intercept one of the young loaders who was wheeling a flower cart away from the last lot.

Spacer left the desk and moved down the steps. There was nothing about the young woman's actions that should have attracted his suspicion, yet it seemed out of place, not part of what he imagined the usual routine to be. He reached the pair in time to hear her say a few words in Dutch that he couldn't quite understand—perhaps something about meeting later. The young man nodded and moved off with his loaded cart. Perhaps, after all, it was only a lovers' meeting.

"Pardon me, Miss—"

She spun around to face him. "Yes?" Close up, her eyes were very blue and her features almost flawless. She reminded him of a girl he'd known in Athens and he wondered if that was why he'd noticed her in the first place.

"Do you speak English?"

She smiled at him. "I am English. I'm Susan Rampart. And you would be Mr. Spacer from Conco International. Weevers pointed you out to me earlier."

"I see."

"You're interested in the computers, of course, and the electronic price clocks."

"Those among other things."

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"Come this way and I'll show you our operation."

"That fellow you were chatting with just now looked familiar."

"Pieter? He's one of the loaders. He helps remove the flowers from the growers' trucks and load them onto our auction carts." She led him behind the counter and began showing him how the electronic clocks operated.

Spacer decided that for the moment, at least, he'd have to resume his professional persona.

It was not difficult to invite Susan Rampart to join him for dinner at the end of the long day. In fact, it came so naturally Spacer thought she'd been expecting the invitation. They dined at a little restaurant he'd discovered near the Rembrandtsplein, and she asked him if he was married.

"I have a wife back in Oak Park, Illinois. It's a suburb of Chicago. But I haven't been home for a couple of years."

"You're the man who was kidnapped by Greek terrorists, aren't you?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"That must have been unpleasant."

"It was. After my release, the corporation transferred me here to Amsterdam."

"I would have thought you'd want to go back home."

"No," he answered simply.

"What do you know about terrorists?"

"Not much. Did Jakob Weevers tell you about my past?"

She took a sip of wine. "No. I remembered your name from the papers. It was only a few months ago."

He was beginning to wonder if she would have sought him out if he hadn't made the first move. He decided she was somewhere close to thirty. Quite a bit younger than he, certainly, but he'd once had an affair with a girl who was young enough to be his daughter. "Is there a terrorist problem in the Netherlands?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Don't you remember when they seized the train and the school? They always have their causes, of course, but I think of them as common criminals."

He remembered what King had said about Jack the Ripper. "I guess I don't follow the papers too closely," he admitted.

"We have one terrorist leader called Minotaur. Have you heard of him?"

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Spacer's expression didn't change. "I don't believe so."

"He's caused the deaths of a great many people."

"Does he live in Amsterdam?"

"Some believe he makes his headquarters here."

"For a British subject you seem quite concerned with local matters."

She studied him with her deep-blue eyes. Finally she said, "I think I can trust you. You've suffered from terrorism too. Minotaur set off a bomb in London, in the Underground, last year. My seven-year-old daughter was killed."

"I'm terribly sorry."

"Now you know why I'm in Amsterdam."

"To find him?"

"Yes. That's why I took the job at the flower market. There have been reports that he operates out of Aalsmeer."

"Your husband—?"

"We were already divorced before it happened. He came to the funeral, but I haven't seen him since."

"What are you going to do if you find Minotaur?"

"I think I'll probably kill him—if he doesn't kill me first."

After dinner he drove her home to a little flat she'd leased on Leidsestraat. She thanked him for the dinner but didn't invite him up. He hadn't really expected she would.

It was dark by the time he reached his own place across town, a seven-room apartment under long-term lease to Conco. The evening was warm, even for late spring, and he stood outside for a time, breathing in the air and thinking about Susan Rampart. Finally he took the elevator to his place on the top floor.

Almost as soon as he'd unlocked the door he sensed something was wrong. A gentle breeze hit his face, yet he knew he hadn't left any of the windows open. It wasn't the cleaning woman's day and no one else had a key. He tensed and turned on the light.

A man lay crumpled in the center of the living-room floor, his body twisted as if in a final attempt to remove the dagger that was plunged deep into his left side. The man was clad in jeans and an open leather jacket, both splattered now with blood. It took Spacer a moment to recognize him.

It was Pieter, the young loader to whom Susan had spoken that morning.

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He locked the apartment door carefully behind him and went down to his car, where he picked up the telephone and punched the number he'd called that morning.

"Dimitri."

"Labyrinth. I need help."

"Where are you?"

"At my apartment."

"Give me fifteen minutes," Dimitri said, and hung up.

Spacer went back up to his apartment and waited.

Until now Dimitri was only a voice on the telephone, and he was surprised when a balding middle-aged man presented himself at the door. "Dimitri?" he asked, a bit uncertainly.

The man smiled, showing a gold tooth. "Labyrinth? What is the trouble?"

Spacer opened the door wider. "A dead man. He was here when I reurned from dinner."

Dimitri bent over the body, feeling for a pulse, as if to confirm the obvious.

"Do you know him?"

"Only that he's named Pieter. He's one of the loaders at the Aalsmeer flower market."

"Do you have any idea who would kill him?"

"No." He decided not to mention Susan speaking with the dead man.

"It may simply be an attempt to embarrass you, to involve you with the police and cripple your usefulness."

"Can you get rid of the body?"

"Of course. Does this building have a service elevator?"

"At the end of the hall. There's also a fire escape that Pieter and—or—his killer may have used to gain entrance through the bedroom window."

"The elevator's safer. Get a blanket to wrap him in and I'll carry him." As he rolled the body over Dimitri asked, "What's this?"

It was a thin cord with a small silver charm attached, lying on the floor. Spacer bent to pick it up. "A tiny minotaur. Pieter must have pulled it off his killer's neck." He opened the dead man's shirt but he wasn't wearing anything similiar.

"Minotaur might have been waiting here for you. This Pieter entered the place to rob it and was killed by mistake."

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"If that's the case, Minotaur knows about me." Spacer studied the tiny silver figure with the head of a bull on the naked body of a man, then dropped it in his pocket.

Dimitri carefully wrapped the body in the blanket Spacer provided, leaving the dagger in place, then hefted it onto his shoulder. "Open the door and lead the way to the service elevator. If we encounter any other tenants, speak with them casually and I'll go on without you."

"Where will you take the body?"

"To one of the canals. By the time it's found, there will be no link to you."

They met no one on the way and reached Dimitri's car without incident. When the body was locked in the trunk, Spacer sighed. "That's one more reason to get Minotaur, I suppose." He was thinking of Susan and her motive. "Will you report this to King?"

"Of course."

"If Minotaur did this, you can assure him I'll do everything I can to bring about his death."

Dimitri looked at him oddly in the dim light. "I thought Colman King had made the purpose of the mission clearer to you."

"Clearer?"

"After you find Minotaur, he doesn't want to kill the man. He wants to hire him."

The following day, Charles Spacer decided it was time for another meeting with King. He sent word via Dimitri and then rode the noon sightseeing launch along the Brouwersgracht.

"It's amazing how many people live on these houseboats," King commented, puffing on his pipe.

Spacer came to the point. "You didn't tell me you want to hire Minotaur."

"Your mission is to find him. What happens after that is Washington's concern."

"The man's a murderer, a terrorist."

"Yes."

"What does Washington want him for?"

"I've been in this business too long to ask questions."

They were passing under a bridge, and Spacer waved to some children up above. "Why was Pieter killed?"

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King chuckled. "You're asking questions. Dimitri thinks he was mistaken for you."

"A man in his twenties, wearing jeans?"

The older man shrugged. "It was dark."

"What was he doing in my room in the first place?"

"Perhaps he had gone to rob you while the girl kept you busy."

Spacer turned sharply in his seat. "If you've got someone watching me, what in hell do you need me for? The girl, as you call her, happens to be around thirty years old and has no relationship to Pieter."

"I understand they often chatted together at the flower market."

"Damn it, King! Call off your watchdogs or I quit! I'm serious! Get someone else to do your dirty work!"

"Calm down. Lower your voice. You find Minotaur for us, and don't worry about the rest of it."

The sightseeing launch was approaching the dock. Spacer got up and said, "I'll be in touch." He didn't wait for a response.

That afternoon he drove back out to Aalsmeer. Pieter's body hadn't been found, and everything seemed normal at the auction. Susan Rampart was at her post beneath the price clock, monitoring the bids. He found Rudolph Hepps, the security chief, and asked if Weevers was anywhere around.

Hepps scratched his curly hair. "You might try his office up above."

Spacer followed his directions and found Jakob Weevers just finishing a telephone call. "Ah, Mr. Spacer! You've returned for a second visit! We're honored."

"Conco's New York office has a few more questions. They're especially interested in the use to which their equipment is put, and the potential use as well. Yesterday your security chief, Hepps, told me there's some pilferage of flowers. Is that much of a problem?"

"Oh, of course. That's why we need a security chief. You must realize a truckload of flowers or plants can have great value. Even a single bulb, if it's an unusual hybrid specimen, can bring as much as ten thousand American dollars."

"I suppose the loaders are in a good position to steal such things."

"Yes, Hepps must keep an eye on them. But what does this have to do with Conco International?"

"We're considering branching out into a line of electronic tags, such

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as some department stores use to discourage shoplifting. If the tagged item is removed from the premises an alarm is sounded. Libraries have tried it too."

"Well, you might speak with Hepps about it. I really don't know how you'd go about the electronic tagging of flowers." His interest seemed to have shifted elsewhere, but Spacer had one more question to ask.

"I found this downstairs in the reception hall," he said, holding out the Minotaur medallion. "Does it belong to one of your employees?"

Weevers gave it barely a glance. "I wouldn't know. We have an employees' bulletin board downstairs. You could hang it there on a thumbtack."

Spacer went back downstairs. He wanted to see Susan, but she was still involved in the bidding. While he waited, he asked Hepps about security and brought the conversation around to the loaders. "I noticed one man yesterday—I think his name was Pieter—but I don't see him today."

The security chief shrugged. "They come and go. He will be back, unless he's found something better."

Spacer took the tiny silver Minotaur from his pocket. "I found this on the floor over there. Does it belong to any of your people?"

"It could be anyone's," Hepps said. He reached down into his own shirt. "See? Many of us wear charms of some sort."

"Yours is a religious medal. This one could almost be considered pagan."

"Men follow different religions," said Hepps. "I'll take it and put it on our employees' bulletin board."

"Let me keep it for a bit. I'd like to meet the owner."

"Suit yourself." Hepps spotted some flowers being loaded into an unmarked van and said, "I have to check on this. I'll see you later."

When Spacer returned to the auction room he saw that Susan was free for the moment. He went to her and asked, "Would you join me for dinner again this evening?"

She smiled. "Weren't you bored enough with me last night?"

He returned her smile.

"Not at all."

"All right. I'm free for dinner, but I have something to do later."

He glanced at his watch.

"Will you be done at five?"

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"Perhaps earlier today. We're auctioning the final lots now."

Her guess was right. Within half an hour she joined him, and they drove into the city together. She knew a little café, The Two Swans, where they went for drinks while they waited for the dinner hour. The clientele was mostly working-class, from the neighborhood, and everyone seemed to know each other. Spacer felt out of place, but Susan led him to a table in the back near some potted plants, where they found a degree of privacy.

"One of the men from the flower market brought me here for the first time," she explained. "He and his friends come here sometimes."

Spacer took a chance. "Pieter?"

Her eyes met his. "Who told you that?"

"You were talking with him yesterday, remember? It was just a guess."

"Yes—I came here with Pieter."

"He wasn't at work today."

"I know. That was strange." She paused, then continued. "I'm going to trust you with a great deal, Charles. You remember we spoke last night about the terrorists? I believe Pieter is one of them."

"One of Minotaur's people?"

"Yes. They've been stealing shipments of flowers and valuable hybrid bulbs to help finance their own and other terrorist groups. Pieter as much as told me so. He said it was a lot safer than robbing banks to get the money."

"You must be very close to him."

"I am."

"Are you in love with him?"

Her face flushed at his question. "Pieter is years younger than I am," she replied. "I told you all this because I trusted you—because you were a victim of terrorists yourself. Perhaps I was mistaken."

"No, you weren't mistaken." He took another chance. "Is it Pieter you're planning to see later tonight?"

"Yes," she admitted. "There's a meeting on one of the houseboats. He hinted that Minotaur himself might be there."

"Will they let you in?"

"It's supposed to be a poetry reading. I went with him once before."

"Could I go too?"

She shook her head. "You are an American. It would be too dangerous."

"Suppose I take you there and wait nearby."

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Susan hesitated. "I might go with Pieter afterward."

"I'll take that chance. I'll be watching nearby, and if you leave with him I won't approach you."

"Fair enough," she agreed.

He didn't tell her that Pieter wouldn't be attending the poetry reading that night.

It was just getting dark when they arrived at the canal where the long green houseboat was docked with a score of others. A few young people in jeans and shorts were sitting around on the top deck, drinking wine. Spacer parked his powder-blue limousine at the end of a row of smaller cars, far enough away to avoid detection, and watched Susan walk quickly along the street to join the others.

While there was still enough light to recognize people, he took a pair of binoculars from the glove compartment and focused them on the deck of the boat, but there were no familiar faces—no one he recognized from the flower market. Then, as he swept the glasses around toward the side street, he caught a glimpse of a balding, middle-aged man ducking into a doorway.

It was Dimitri.

Was the man tailing him? Was that how King had known about his date with Susan the previous night?

He picked up the telephone and rang Dimitri's number, curious to see what would happen. A recorded voice answered. "Dimitri is busy now. Leave a message and he will call you back shortly."

Spacer broke the connection without replying. The voice had spoken in English. Perhaps the number was known only to King and the other Americans with whom Dimitri dealt.

It was too dark now to see if he was still in the doorway, so Spacer turned his attention back to the houseboat. He could make out figures on the top deck outlined against the evening sky. There seemed to be about twenty people in all, with a few more arrivals straggling in. Presently it was too dark to see even that much. Lights were turned on inside the houseboat, but there were closed curtains on the windows.

At about ten o'clock, Susan suddenly reappeared. He hadn't noticed her in the dark until she was almost to the car. She opened the door and slipped into the seat beside him. "That was pleasant," she said. "But boring."

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"What about Pieter?"

"Strange—he wasn't there. Nobody even mentioned him. They just read poetry. There was very little conversation about anything else."

"Did you see anyone you knew from the flower market?"

"No one. A few of the people were Pieter's friends, whom I'd met earlier, but that was all. I asked one girl where he was, but she just shrugged."

"I'll drive you home," he said.

When they reached the little flat on Leidsestraat, she asked him if he'd like a cup of coffee.

The apartment was cramped and a bit shabby, not at all like Susan. "I rented it furnished," she explained. "I didn't plan to stay this long."

"Is vengeance becoming a lifetime occupation for you?"

"I don't know," she answered with a frown, placing her purse carefully on the dresser next to a framed photograph of a little girl.

"This was your daughter?"

"Yes."

Stuck in the corner of the frame was a small snapshot taken on the deck of the houseboat he'd just seen. Susan was facing the camera with a glass of wine in her hand, squinting against the sun. Pieter stood next to her, bare-chested and grinning. The sun had made a little shining spot in the center of his chest.

"You like him very much," Spacer commented.

"He's a means to an end. He'll lead me to Minotaur, the man who killed my daughter."

She was in the kitchen preparing the coffee when he came up to her and kissed her. "What does that mean?" she asked.

"Just that you're very beautiful."

After coffee he followed her into the bedroom, and as he held her he whispered, "I think I might be in love with you."

Later, when she was asleep, he got up and searched her purse.

In the morning Spacer drove back out to the Aalsmeer flower market. He'd wanted Susan to ride along, but she always took the bus and said she didn't want to change her routine. Spacer checked in at the Conco office first, collecting a batch of dreary messages from New York. One day soon he'd have to return to being a full-time executive, but not yet. Not quite yet.

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On the drive out he tried to determine if he was being followed, but he saw no sign of Dimitri or of anyone else. He wondered if the sighting the night before had been his imagination.

At the flower market he went straight to Rudolph Hepps. "I want to speak to you regarding security," he said.

Hepps smiled. "Are you still thinking about tagging the flowers, Mr. Spacer? Weevers told me of your idea."

"Some information's come my way. I believe the man named Pieter might be involved in thefts of flowers."

"That accusation has been made before, and thoroughly investigated." Hepps stepped into his little office and pulled open a file drawer. "Look here—the file on Pieter Miller."

"His last name is Miller?"

"He anglicized it. He's a French citizen, actually—he was born in Paris twenty-six years ago."

"I thought he was younger than that."

"Three months ago, Mr. Weevers suspected Pieter of stealing some valuable hybrid tulip bulbs. I detained him as he was leaving for the day and conducted a strip search. I also searched his locker and a desk in the loading area he sometimes uses. There were no bulbs, and Weevers apologized to him."

"I see."

"Where did you get your information about Pieter Miller?"

"I can't tell you that, but it might be a good idea to search his locker."

Hepps nodded.

"He hasn't been to work for two days. If he doesn't return tomorrow, I'll ask Mr. Weevers for permission to open the locker."

Spacer left him and spent the rest of the day inspecting the Conco parts used in the electronic price clocks. He knew he couldn't risk returning a fourth time without attracting Weevers' suspicion, and he hoped he could tie up all the loose ends that night.

After work Susan Rampart sought him out. "Will I be seeing you tonight?"

"I hope so. Look, can you drive?"

"Yes."

He took out his keys. "Take my car out of the parking lot and drive it down the road a bit. Wait for me there."

Most of the employees had departed. Only two sweepers remained in

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the reception hall, sweeping up blossoms and leaves that had fallen from the flower carts. Spacer avoided them and slipped quietly into the employees' locker area.

He didn't have long to wait. Within a half hour the person he'd expected arrived, carrying a large cloth sack. As one of the locker doors was opened, Spacer stepped from his hiding place. "What is it you have there?"

Rudolph Hepps whirled around. "I thought you were gone!"

"Only my car. Those are tulip bulbs, aren't they? And you're planting them in Pieter's locker."

"I—"

"They won't grow very well in there, you know. But, of course, with Pieter dead he's in no position to say he didn't steal them. When I suggested searching the locker, I thought you'd take the opportunity to frame him."

"Pieter is dead?" Hepps shifted his feet slightly.

"You killed him in my apartment two nights ago, Hepps. The two of you were financing the Minotaur terrorists with money from stolen flower shipments. You decided you didn't need Pieter any more, so you killed him."

Before he could answer there was a shout from behind Spacer. He turned to see Susan in the doorway, holding a small automatic pistol. "You killed my daughter, Minotaur! Now you'll die for it!"

Before Hepps could move, she fired three times.

Dimitri came through the door behind Susan and grabbed her before she could fire again. Hepps, stunned but unhurt, turned to run. Spacer took three quick steps and collared him, shoving him back against the row of lockers.

Dimitri looked from the girl to Hepps, still uncertain. "Which one is the murderer?"

"Mr. Hepps here. Call King and ask him what to do. We can't have Hepps arrested without the body."

Dimitri had taken the gun from Susan. She was leaning against the wall, sobbing. "What happened? I shot him! Why didn't he die?"

Spacer took a deep breath. "There's been too much killing already. You said you'd kill Minotaur and I believed you. I suspected from the careful way you handled your purse last night that you'd taken a weapon to the houseboat with you in the event Minotaur did show up. While

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you were asleep I searched your purse and pried the lead slugs from the bullets in your gun. I replaced them with little twists of paper to hold the powder in the cartridges, making blanks of the bullets."

"I wanted to kill him," she said.

"It would have been a mistake."

Dimitri had handcuffed Hepps and gone to telephone Colman King. Now he returned and said, "He wants to see you at once."

"The usual place?"

"Yes."

Spacer turned to Susan. "I have to go. Dimitri will get you back safely."

She stared at him. "Charles—who are you?"

"Perhaps someday I can tell you." He kissed her on the lips and left the building.

She'd parked the car about a quarter mile down the road. He walked to it and drove into the city on Rijksweg 4. A half hour later he was seated on the sightseeing launch next to Colman King.

"This is the last cruise of the evening," King remarked. "You were lucky to make it."

"It's been my lucky day."

"Tell me about it."

"I'll keep it brief. Minotaur's terrorists were financing their operations through thefts from the Aalsmeer flower market. Thefts on this scale wouldn't have been possible without the aid of Hepps, the security chief. Something made Pieter suspicious of me from the very beginning. Perhaps he saw me phoning Dimitri from my car shortly after my arrival. In any event, he broke into my apartment through a fire-escape window to see what he could find out about me. Hepps had probably decided he didn't need Pieter any more and followed him there. He figured killing Pieter in my apartment would implicate me rather than the flower market and, without Pieter, he could keep the proceeds of the thefts for himself."

Colman King sighed. "A nice customer Washington wants to do business with."

"You won't be doing any business with Minotaur," Spacer said.

"Why not?"

"You've got the thing backward. Rudolph Hepps is not, and never was, the terrorist called Minotaur."

"What? Then who—?"

"Minotaur is dead. Minotaur was Pieter Miller."

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Colman King was silent for a time. Finally he asked, "How do you know?"

"His seeming youth fooled me at first, because Minotaur has been operating for some years. But Pieter was twenty-six, not as young as he looked. And Susan Rampart had already told me he was involved in the thefts to finance the terrorists. He told her he'd take her to a houseboat last night where Minotaur would be present. Pieter didn't go, of course, because he was already dead. But Susan didn't think Minotaur put in an appearance either. There could have been several explanations, but at least one was that Pieter and Minotaur were the same person."

"You must have more than that."

"Oh, yes. You see this little silver charm in the shape of a Minotaur? I found it by Pieter's body and jumped to the conclusion it had been torn from the killer's neck during their struggle. But it was just as likely it came from Pieter's own neck. Susan has a photograph of him wearing a silver medal, and since there was none on the body, I think this is it. Yet when I showed it to Hepps he denied knowing whose it was."

"Perhaps he never saw it."

Spacer shook his head. "The two men worked together. Hepps had even done a strip search of Pieter when the young man was accused of stealing valuable tulip bulbs. Hepps lied about this charm belonging to Pieter, and that was all the confirmation I needed that Hepps was part of the gang, and most likely Pieter's killer."

"Even if he wore this, it doesn't prove Pieter was Minotaur. Maybe all the gang members wear them."

"All right, then—here's a final fact for you. Hepps told me Pieter was French, and that he'd anglicized his last name of Miller. Miller in French is Minotier. Minotaur and Minotier—the terrorist's pseudonym was merely a variation of his last name."

"Is this the sort of proof I can give Washington?"

"Hepps knows the whole story. I'm sure you can persuade him to talk, especially if you suggest the truth might reduce the murder charge against him. Have the Dutch police charge him with the thefts and forget the murder. Pieter's body is in the canal anyway, and perhaps Hepps did the world a favor by killing him."

"He didn't do Washington a favor."

"Don't be too sure of that." Charles Spacer could see children playing in the twilight along the canal, and he remembered Susan's daughter.

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Who had tampered with Kathy's skate? . . .

A MATTER OF SKATING

by LAWRENCE TREAT

With the Junior Regional Figure Skating Competition coming up in just ten days, LePage County found out it had a champion in the making—maybe two. And both a mere twelve years old. Of the pair, Kathy Silvers was a breeze to win, and the papers followed her practically every day.

"With her natural talent," a sportswriter stated, "her backers are looking beyond the regional competition all the way up to a national championship. A Kathy Silvers skate is being planned, and several major cereal

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companies are dickering for her sponsorship. Samples of national products are pouring into the Silvers home and the local post office is getting ready for an avalanche of mail."

All of which was no affair of Willy Wharton, chief of the LePage County police. As he told Dan Moorhead, his counterpart across the state line in Morgan County, figure skating was not his dish. As a kid, Willy had bought a pair of secondhand skates that fitted him as bad as his old man's rubbers, and he'd gone out on the ice. After a few dozen pratfalls, he was playing hockey.

"And probably not much good at it either," Dan said.

Willy shrugged. "I could trip 'em up as good as anybody. How about you?"

"I," Dan said, "can still do a figure eight, a double mohawk, or a cherry flip."

"What's that?"

"A double loop," Dan said. "It's like this." On the surface of the table where they were having beers at the Right Side Bar & Grill he drew a diagram that looked like the end sections of a pair of parentheses, one above the other and not quite connected. "That's the tracing you make on the ice," he said. "What you do is take off from the back outside edge of your skate, land on the same back outside edge, and make a design on the ice like I just drew." Willy looked puzzled and Dan added, "After you've thrown a double turn. In the air, of course."

"What," Willy said, "is an outside edge? And why all the doubletalk?"

"You wouldn't understand," Dan said. "But if you want to be a figure skater, you start young—around six or even younger—and you practice four or five hours a day for the rest of your life. I gave up when I got interested in dames." His chubby face dimpled up in a grin. "When I was about nine."

Willy scowled and ordered another beer.

But the Junior Figure Skating Championship was an important affair, with TV and the movies and the whole commercial gamut at the end of the icy rainbow. In other words, large succulent baskets of dough. Consequently, the sports pages featured Kathy regularly, though she didn't make the headlines until the accident.

It was reported in a two-column spread halfway down on the front page. KATHY OUT AFTER BROKEN ANKLE—COACH CLAIMS SABOTAGE.

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Since there was money at stake, Willy smelled skulduggery, and early the next morning he stopped off at the Forsyth Town Hall and walked into the cement-block room with the door labeled FORSYTH POLICE DEPARTMENT.

Chief van Munder, who headed an underpaid force of ten, was sweating out the wording in a copy of the Revised Zoning Regulations of LePage County, and having a hard time of it. He shoved the booklet aside and greeted Willy. When he found out what Willy was after, he summed up the situation in three words.

"Nothing to it," he said.

"You investigated?"

"Sure. Somebody phoned in and claimed malicious mischief, so I went over to the rink. But it was just an accident. The skate wasn't screwed onto the shoe tight enough, so her ankle twisted when she landed on the ice after making some kind of a jump."

"Have you got the shoe?" Willie asked.

Van Munder looked puzzled. "It's her shoe," he said. "What would I do with it?"

"Have you got the screws?"

"What for?"

"Who was there when it happened?"

"A lot of people. Her coach, of course—name of Kossett. I guess he was the one who phoned in. Anyhow, he claimed another coach had monkeyed with the skates, and there was some kind of a fight before I got there. They threw a couple of punches, but nobody got hurt. How come you're interested?"

"I like fights," Willy said drily. "Besides, there might be a few charges besides malicious mischief. Probably third-degree assault, willful endangerment, and that new statute about tampering with sports equipment." He stood up, the whole hunk of him, and let van Munder shrink down into his own inanity.

Outside, Willy got into his car and drove over to the rink.

There were about twenty cars in the parking lot, and as Willy picked his space a bright-yellow sportscar swept past him and cut him off with a flourish. The car had a pennant flying from the radio mast, stripes emblazoned on all sides, and tire and car names stamped in large print all over the tires and doors. The kid who'd been driving vaulted out and banged the door behind him as if he hoped to collect insurance on it.

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Without breaking his stride, he made a beeline for the side entrance to the rink.

Willy walked over to the car and noted the license number. Kids like that, you had to watch them. With that little job done, he entered the building.

A guy that Willy remembered as working in the motor-vehicle bureau recognized Willy and said, "You too, Chief? Now that Kathy's out of the running, everybody's here to watch Priss do her patch."

"Patch?" Willy said. "What's that?"

"That's what they call it. A patch is the part of the rink you rent for practice. That piece of ice is yours—your patch—and nobody interferes with you."

Willy, feeling that between Dan and this guy he was getting more of an education in the basics of figure skating than he really wanted, walked out to the rink. A couple of dozen fans were sitting in the stands and a few more were clustered at the rink exits watching the skaters working out—doing fancy stunts in the form of jumps and spins and swings. Willy's eyes fastened on a sprig of a child, maybe eleven or twelve, who was whirling like a wind indicator in a hurricane. When she finished up, a guy in a red skating cap standing next to Willy said, "Nice camel."

"Camel?"

The guy looked at Willy.

"Priscilla—she's the Burkenhead kid—just did a camel," he said. "A camel spin, see? And Rafe, her coach, is measuring the size of the circle she made with her skate. For a perfect camel, the tracing has to have a diameter the size of your skate. But nobody's that good. Kathy could come fairly close, but Priss—she's been working on that camel for the last ten minutes. She'll probably do a sit-spin next, only—"

"Only she'll probably put one hand down on the ice to balance herself. But what else do you expect, with Rafe coaching her?"

Willy turned to look at the girl who'd interrupted. She was wearing a blue-grey outfit, and her black eyes were as excited as if she expected Santa Claus to come out of the nearest exit and she wanted to be there.

Willy gave her his best once-over. "Why?" he said. "What's the matter with Rafe?"

"He may be all right for some people," she said, "but if you have real talent you need somebody like Vinny."

"Who's Vinny?"

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"Vinny Kossett, Kathy's coach," the girl said, and amazement at Willy's ignorance streamed out of her like a sour note out of a trumpet. "I'm Vera Kossett, his wife."

"Glad to know you," Willy said, and went back to watching the rink.

Rafe Zolinsky had skated over to the side of the rink, picked up a small recorder, and skated back with it. For a figure skater he was constructed all wrong. He was top-heavy, with a head too big for his body—with his thick torso and heavy legs he looked more like a performing bear than a figure skater. Yet he had an unexpected grace.

"What's the tape recorder for?" Willy asked Vera.

"Dance music. Rafe has it on tape. It's the music they'll play for her when she performs, and she's rehearsing her choreography. But—" She broke off. "Look—there's Vinny."

If Rafe looked like a Neanderthal man, Vinny could have stepped off a magazine cover. He was tall, slim, and blond, and he moved easily, as if he had cat muscles. Coming out on the rink, he skated around the circumference, grandstanding with the arrogance of a newly scrubbed show dog. As he sped past, Willy could feel the Vinny charm descend on him and he involuntarily rolled his shoulders to shake it off.

But, feeling that something was going to happen, Willy kept watching. He saw Rafe slow up and Priscilla almost bump into him, whereupon Rafe, skating backward, said something to her. Vinny, increasing his speed, came charging straight at Rafe but at the last second leaped up and turned in midair. As he did so, his free skate swung out and his toe pick raked at Rafe's thigh.

Rafe ducked. The pick, if it touched him at all, barely scraped his slacks, but he went down. Vinny, executing an axel, made a T-stop that brought him up short. "Sorry," he said. There was scorn in his voice and in his manner as he skated back across the rink to the exit.

Rafe picked himself up and resumed the lesson as if nothing had happened. Vera clapped her hands in applause and, smiling, went over to a group who were obviously fans of her husband. After a moment, Willy walked over to the soft rubber matting that led to the locker room, where Vinny sat on a bench. He glowered up at Willy. "Want something?"

"That was a fast one you pulled just now," Willy said.

"You know who he is, don't you?" Vinny said. "He's the guy who fiddled with Kathy's skate."

"How do you know that?"

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"Everybody does. And who the hell are you, anyhow?"

"Chief Wharton, of LePage," Willy said, and showed his wallet with his identification. "Now tell me what happened."

"What happened was that Zolinsky loosened a couple of screws on Kathy's skate." Vinny took off one of his own and showed Willy where the boot was screwed to the skate. "Feel that," he said. "Your boot and your skate have to be solid, like part of your foot. Loosen the skate—and you know what happened to Kathy."

"Where's the skate?"

"How do I know? The cops looked at it, said it must have been an accident, and handed it back to the kid. Or to her parents. Or maybe to Jimmy."

"Who's Jimmy?"

"The locker-room boy. Look, Chief—what's the use of all these questions? It's over. No more dreams of getting back into the big time. Here I had this kid—she hit nine every time, sometimes even better. Any kid her age is lucky to make eight."

"What are you talking about?"

"Points. In competition you get judged on points, one to ten. On form, on your tracings, on—what the hell. Do you want a lesson in skating or judging, or what?"

"I want to know who could have loosened those screws. You say Zolinsky did it. How do you know? Did he have the chance?"

"Chief, I taught that Silvers kid to look her skates over every time she was going to go on the ice. I taught her how to check the edges and make sure the boot was firm. I had a lot at stake. If she got as far as the nationals, and certainly if she won them, she'd be on TV and in the movies and I'd not only get a piece of it, but I'd get a plush job. I'd be the guy who did it. I'd be able to get a job as a pro with any skating club in the country. They might even ask me to coach the Olympics."

"When," Willy said again, "would Zolinsky have the chance to get hold of her skates?"

"Anytime. That kid skates like a dream, but she's no dream the way she runs to the Coke machine every time I turn my back. All she does is stuff herself with junk food."

"Did she go to the Coke machine just before she went out on the ice the morning she fell?"

"Ask Jimmy: He was around—he always is."

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Vinny raised his voice. "Hey, Jimmy!"

The answer came from inside the locker room. "Yeah? Who wants me?"

The kid who came out was the boy who'd driven the sportscar that had cut Willy off. "Hey, Vinny—what do you want?" he asked.

"The police chief here has a couple of questions about Kathy's skates. You said you checked them, didn't you?"

"Sure," Jimmy said. "I looked them over and made sure they were O.K., then I handed them back to her. She wanted a quarter, which I didn't have, so she borrowed one from Mrs. Kossett and made a beeline for the candy machine. How she could soak up that stuff and then go out and skate—you wouldn't believe it, Chief."

"Jimmy," Willy said, "let's you and me go someplace where we can talk quietly."

The cockiness went out of Jimmy. It was one thing to say whatever he felt like to van Munder, who would swallow every word, but Willy was something else again. Everybody in the county knew that when Willy set his mouth to it, he was a pretty persuasive guy. "Sure," he said. "Come on back here where I keep the rental stuff."

The small room had skates of all sizes and types, hockey sticks and pucks, and boxes of various items for sale. There was a desk with a swivel chair in front of it. Willy propped himself against the desk and motioned to the chair.

"Tell me exactly how Kathy fell," Willy said.

"She was working up her free-skate choreography and she'd just done a double axel and she went down. That happens sometimes, but this time she didn't get up. I could tell something was wrong, so I ran out on the ice. Rafe was bending over her, and she was crying. The skate had almost come off the boot, and I saw a couple of broken screws lying there."

"What happened to them?"

"I picked them up."

"What for?"

"Because I could tell right off there was something wrong with them. They were short. They could hardly keep the boot on."

"But you'd checked the skates a little while before that, hadn't you?"

"Sure, and they seemed solid. But you take a short screw—it's solid enough until you put side pressure on it, then it won't hold."

"Was anybody else around when you say you checked the skates?"

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"Chief," Jimmy said, "I know what you're thinking, but I liked Kathy. Most of these rich kids treat you like they own you, but not Kathy. We got along fine."

"All right, you picked up the screws. Where are they?"

Jimmy opened a desk drawer and took out a small envelope. "Here. I kept them just in case."

"What about her skates?"

"How would I know? Skates like that cost plenty—maybe somebody hooked them."

"Somebody like you?" Willy said. Then his voice-pager beeped, and he picked up the phone on the desk and called his office. They had a suspect in that rape case in Osgood Park. Did Willy want to interrogate? He said he'd be right over. After leaving word for Zolinsky to come see him that afternoon, Willy returned to his office.

He was busy most of the day and Zolinsky must have been waiting around for an hour or so, but he was soft-spoken and unruffled when he came in and sat down.

After introducing himself, Willy said, "Vinny claims you doctored up the screws on Kathy's skates. You had reason for it, so let's hear where you were for the half hour or so before Kathy went out on the ice."

"If you want an alibi," Rafe said, "I have none. I was in the building, I was in the locker room—I was everywhere. I could have done it, and I certainly had the opportunity. And to the extent that Priss now has a chance for the regional title that she didn't have before, I suppose I had a motive. If Priss wins or even comes close without winning, I'll receive some job offers at substantially more pay than I'm getting here. But I'm not interested."

"You don't like money?" Willy said.

"Not that much. Chief, I have a family here, my boys go to school and have their friends here, they're happy. My wife has a useful job at the hospital. All of us belong. I make thirty dollars an hour teaching, and I'm turning people away. I don't want to give up all that. What for? For a few extra dollars I'd have to move to a new place where no one knows us and our boys would have to start all over again. No; sir. You couldn't pay me enough."

"If you didn't sabotage Kathy, then who did?"

"I have no idea."

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"Doesn't Priss have backers who stand to make a pile now that Kathy's out of the running?"

"I suppose so, but I don't involve myself with such matters. I teach figure skating and I love it. It's my whole life. Developing talent, watching children like Priss become proficient—that's where the satisfaction is for me."

"But Kossett's the number-one coach. You must be jealous of him."

"I wouldn't want to be like him for anything in the world," Rafe said.

"Why not?"

"Don't you know his story? Vinny was the sensation of Innsbruck a few years ago, picking up medals, everybody running after him. Women—he couldn't hold them off. He got to mixing it up with everybody important, people with more dough than he ever dreamed of, but it was too much for him and he ended up in a hospital, in the alcoholic ward. That's when Vera hooked him."

"His wife?"

"That's right. She pulled him up out of his depression and got him to apply for a job in a small town—here. She watches over him like a wet nurse. He's been O.K. for a few years now, but I'd like to bet he's eating himself up with the yen to get back to where he was."

"You think so?"

"Ask him," Rafe said. "I know he's trying to move away from here. The place is too small for him. And after the dirt he and his wife are spreading about me, I'd be glad to see him go."

When Willy got to his regular booth at the Right Side Bar & Grill that evening, instead of Dan he found an overstuffed ox of a man sitting there as if he'd bought the booth and paid cash for every square inch of it. He nodded at Willy and waited for him to sit down.

"I'm Anthony Burkenhead, Priscilla's father," he said.

"And you want to talk to me. Why here?"

"Because I don't want anybody to see me go into your office and think you sent for me."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Bad for business. People are likely to misinterpret."

"Mr. Burkenhead," Willy said, "if you have any information, let's have it. And don't play cute."

"Me cute?" Burkenhead said. "I just want to talk straight, that's all.

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I want to stop this story about me or Priscilla's backers hiring somebody to tamper with Kathy Silvers' skates."

"Did you?" Willy asked blandly.

Burkenhead pounded the table with his hammer of a fist, then abruptly burst into laughter. "Maybe I should have," he said. "Chief, that Silvers kid is a troublemaker, and maybe it's a good thing she broke her ankle. Maybe she'll learn something."

"What?"

"Nothing." Burkenhead stood up. "She's dirt, Chief, just like her father. They're all dirt—nobody likes them or ever will— So what are you going to do?"

"The first thing I'm going to do is ask you to sit down."

Burkenhead scratched his jaw, looked around the room, saw that people were watching him, and sat down. "Well?"

"What happens to Priss now?" Willy asked. "Is she going to change coaches?"

Burkenhead nodded. "You bet she is. Vinny wouldn't take both kids, but now that Kathy's out of the running he's the man for me. All Rafe is interested in is skating, he doesn't care about medals. But Vinny—he wants his kids to go places. He's been there himself. That's what it's all about, isn't it?"

Willy didn't go along with that. But he was finding out that the stakes in so-called amateur competition can be pretty high. A busted ankle might be the least he could expect. He supposed he ought to be thankful nobody had been killed.

Around half-past eight, Dan arrived and squeezed himself into his usual place. If Willy had had a stopwatch he would have timed the operation for a record in slow motion. Instead, he merely asked a question. "Something happen?"

Dan pondered the question. "Been skating," he said.

Willy remembered what Dan had said the other evening, that he could still do a figure eight, a double mohawk, or a cherry flip. He waited a few seconds before he said, "Well?"

"They don't make ice the way they used to," Dan said. "The stuff they freeze these days is too slippery, too hard." He patted his rump. "Willy, believe it or not, I fell."

Willy took the news deadpan. "Fell?" he said.

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Dan nodded. "Twice," he said. "Let's change the subject."

After that they were both silent for a little while, because their evening ritual demanded a gulp or two of beer before getting down to anything important. When the moment came, Willy stated his case. "Here's a twelve-year-old who's worth a million or more to her backers," he said, "and all she's interested in is sneaking away for a candy bar. So she leaves her skates somewhere while she puts a quarter in the slot and comes back five or ten minutes later and picks up her skates. Anybody could have tampered with them while she was gone. But who did?"

"Have you seen Kathy?" Dan asked.

"Not yet, but I've heard plenty about her. People either love her or hate her. I figure she's a smart kid who knows how to use people."

"Have you seen her skates?" Dan asked.

"No, but I have the screws that held her shoes on."

"Boots," Dan said.

"O.K., boots. I have them here. Take a look." He took them out of his pocket and handed them to Dan, who examined them while Willy told of Burkenhead's visit earlier. "If I knew where these came from," Willy said, "maybe I'd be better off. Jimmy says he picked them up off the ice, but did he?"

"Screws like this," Dan said, "you find in practically every kitchen drawer, together with a rusty hammer and a slightly bent screwdriver. So where do they leave you?"

"Stymied," Willy said. "Rafe had a motive, and Jimmy could have been paid by Burkenhead or any of his crowd. So basically I have only two real suspects."

"Three," Dan said. "There's Kossett."

"Him? He's the loser."

"Maybe not," Dan said. "He might be a lot better off with things this way."

"How come?"

"If Kathy won out he'd be in clover, sure. But suppose she didn't win. What if she cracked under the pressure? What about the one time in a million that she fell? Suppose she saw somebody and lost her concentration? Suppose somebody needled her just before her act and unsettled her? There are a lot of ifs when you're dealing with a twelve-year-old, Willy."

"Go on."

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"Kossett coached Kathy and he's riding on her notoriety. He made her number one, and right now he has all the prestige of having created a favorite. So why wouldn't he fix her skate and eliminate all future risks?"

"Because he's after something else," Willy said. "He was at the top once before, and while he flubbed it and started drinking and couldn't stop he still hankers after that glamour. Maybe he wants to show people he's strong enough now to keep his head above water. Anyhow, he's lost his big chance at a comeback and I imagine he's eating his heart out. The same thing with Kathy."

"You'd better go see her next," Dan said.

Willy went in the morning, and from the way the receptionist and the head nurse spoke of her she seemed to be the darling of the hospital. "It's such a shame," the receptionist said. "She's a lovely child," the nurse told Willy.

But the floor nurse who came storming out of her room said differently. "The brat," she muttered. "She ought to have her hide tanned."

Willy, who accepted both versions just as he accepted the two sides of most people he came across, found a pathetic little bundle lying in the hospital bed, her foot in a plaster cast suspended by a sling that hung from a monstrous metal frame. Her small face was almost as white as the pillow and her brown eyes were drenched with hopelessness. She looked at Willy sadly.

"Go away," she said.

"Why? Don't you like visitors?"

"Not strangers," she said. But Willy persisted.

"This is tough on you," he said. "Real tough."

Kathy glared.

"Here you had all this ahead of you. Maybe a gold medal. Everybody admiring you. You might even have got on TV."

She looked at her hands.

"I guess you don't have much fun here—no other kids around. You just lie here and wonder, and hate anybody who walks in."

"What do you want?" Kathy asked. "My autograph?"

"No. Just say I'm interested in what happened. I'm kind of looking into it."

"Why? Are you trying to make some money out of me?"

"Kathy, that's the last thing I want."

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"It's *all* people want out of me. And strangers come in just to look at me. I hate them—I wish they'd die." She sniffled. "I wish I could die too. I wish I'd never learned how to skate."

"I guess you didn't want to win," Willy said. "Scared, weren't you?"

"What makes you think that?"

Willy sat down by the bed and put his hand on hers. "Kathy," he said, "you were pretty lucky to get out of it. All that fuss—who wants it?"

"Who are you?" she demanded anxiously.

"I'm a police officer," Willy said, "and I'm trying to find out who fiddled around with your skate."

"Then go ahead and find out," she said. "That's what you're paid for, isn't it?"

"I can't find out unless you help me. Who do you think did it, Kathy?"

She gazed at him with a pleading expression, and when tears came into her eyes Willy thought of all she'd gone through—four hours of practice every day, up at five in the morning and on the ice before seven, day after day. And where had it gotten her? He was about to tell her it was all right, things would get better, she'd be up and on her skates again before she knew it, when her eyes narrowed and she yelled, "Go away—get out of here!"

"Me?" Willy said, and then he turned around and saw Vera Kossett standing in the doorway.

"What did you come for?" Kathy cried. "Do you want your quarter back?"

Willy rose and walked over to Vera Kossett. "I'd like to talk to you," he said.

He told Dan about it that evening. "When the kid mentioned the quarter, it reminded me that Vera had been in the locker room when Kathy left her skates behind to go to the candy machine, so it was clear she had the opportunity. The next thing was Kathy's crack about coming to get her quarter back, which meant this was probably Vera's first visit to the hospital. So why had she come? Not for love and affection—but why, then? Guilt?

"That was when I realized Vera had a motive. I'd assumed she wanted Vinny to have his big chance, but I was all wrong. She'd seen him as an alcoholic and she didn't want to repeat the experience. He needed watching over. But how could she manage it if he was subject to all the pressures

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at the top? And he would be if Kathy won that junior championship. It could mean the end of their marriage.

"All of that hit me right on the nose, so I sat her down in the lounge and gave it to her straight. All she said was that she loved him and didn't want to lose him. Some love!"

Willy scowled himself into thinking about her for a couple of seconds. "A lousy trick like that, and she'll probably get nothing more than a suspended sentence. Still, she'll probably lose Vinny. He probably won't be around any more."

"He'll be around," Dan said. "He's giving me lessons."

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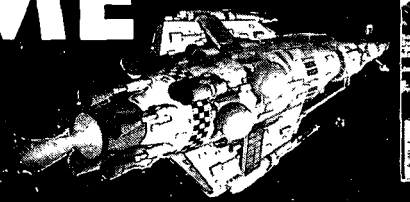

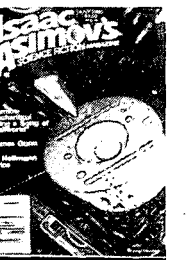

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Maria was adamant—her husband would never have left her . . .

GOOD RIDDANCE

by STEPHEN WASYLYK

The dark-haired woman in Mandola's office drew a great many surreptitious glances from the men in the squad room. The glances were because she was attractive and they were surreptitious because no one wanted to be caught staring into the lieutenant's office.

Except me.

I stared. I had always been partial to women with long hair and faces more interesting than plastic-pretty, who walked tall and carried them-

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selves well. This one had a face that was a trifle bony, with high cheeks and slanted eyes, and downright magnetic in spite of the worried expression that was apparent even from a distance.

Mandola lifted a finger and beckoned.

When I walked into his office he nodded to her. "The seedy-looking character before you is Sergeant Cole, one of our better detectives, not because he is exceptionally talented but because he has almost twenty years of experience." He nodded to me. "Mrs. Maria Davori, Cole."

I lifted my eyebrows to tell him a fat man in danger of waking one morning to find he no longer could squeeze behind his desk was in no position to call anyone seedy. At least I would have no difficulty in buttoning my shirt collar if I chose. I smiled at the woman.

"My pleasure." I meant it. Up close her face was even more interesting, her eyes deep and dark, her mouth generous.

Mandola said, "Mrs. Davori is an old friend. She has a problem. Her husband failed to come home last night."

"What can we do to help?"

"We can't handle any part of it officially. They live in New Jersey and her husband also works in a branch bank in Deptford, so the matter is completely out of our jurisdiction. I've explained that all we can do is go over there and ask around."

"The local police?"

"Maria would prefer we look into it first. I'd also like to keep a handle on it, as a favor to her. Since this is to be an unofficial inquiry, let's keep this division completely out of it. Take her across the street to the coffee shop and talk to her there."

I could feel every eye in the place on us as we walked out. I was thinking that she had to be a very good friend of Mandola's if he was willing to pull me away from our homicide caseload and send me where we just might get in trouble with the local authorities for sticking our nose where it didn't belong. But Mandola doesn't mind bending rules occasionally, which is one reason we get along so well.

We found a table and ordered coffee. She clasped her hands on the table and looked down at them.

"We grew up together—Mandola and I."

I liked the way she brought the subject up because she knew I had to be wondering. "Tell me about your husband."

She waited until the young waitress served the coffee and departed.

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"His name is Dennis."

I studied her as she talked. She had a pleasant voice, a trifle husky, easy to listen to.

Her husband had left his job as usual the previous day but had never appeared for dinner. He was the assistant manager of a branch bank office in Deptford and, according to her, he was very meticulous about informing her when he wouldn't be home. She'd waited until late that night before calling the police and hospitals, but had turned up nothing. On the face of it, he'd left work and simply disappeared.

The first question I asked was the possibility of his being involved with another woman. She said she didn't think he was, but there was a haunting shadow in her eyes that said she wasn't entirely sure.

How did he feel about his job? "I suppose," she said, "there isn't a man alive who at one time or another doesn't want to put his car on the nearest interstate and keep going."

She paused. "He would never leave me. Not now."

The *not now* separated themselves from her other words, but I couldn't follow them up as she kept talking, and what began to emerge was the picture of a nervous, irritable man who was ready to take off for somewhere. He didn't like living where and how they were living, which was with his mother-in-law. His job was routine, their social life almost nonexistent. He did go out alone on Thursday nights, insisting he was entitled to one night to himself each week—where he went or what he did she didn't know and had never asked.

I wished she'd been a little more curious.

I finished my coffee. "All right," I said. "I'll stop by later this afternoon and let you know what I've found out. Can I give you a lift?"

She shook her head. "My car is outside."

I watched her drive away, feeling she'd told me only what she thought I should know.

"Let's have the whole story," I said to Mandola.

He fired up one of his pollutant cigars. "The husband is a loser. The kind who's always looking to hit a home run and strikes out while those who are content to hit singles keep passing him by. He's had half a dozen jobs since I've known him, none of them paying well. As a legal secretary, she made more than he does."

"Is there any reason to suspect foul play?"

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"It's an outside possibility." He waved the cigar. "Let me give you some facts. Her father died after an illness that left a debt of something like fifty thousand dollars on Maria's hands. The obvious thing would have been to sell the parents' house, pay the bills, and move the mother into their apartment, but there were complications."

"There always are."

"The mother's quite elderly, not well, and has lost her eyesight. To move her out of the house where she's lived for forty years and knows every creaking floorboard would have been cruel. Maria has a younger brother who's only nineteen and still lives at home—she could hardly throw him out. So she talked her husband into moving into the house with her mother and brother, remortgaged the place for fifty thousand, paid off the debts, quit her job to take care of the mother, and is trying to hold the whole thing together until the mother passes away and the brother is out on his own. It isn't working out too well. Paying off the mortgage is a big drain and the brother and the husband don't get along."

"So there's more at stake than a missing husband."

Mandola nodded. "If she's lost him, she'll have to go back to work. But she can't leave the mother alone. She insists he'd never leave her in that situation."

I shook my head. "Mandola, I thought one of the first things we learned in this business was to stay clear of domestic difficulties. This thing sounds like a soap opera."

He rested the cigar in the ashtray. "All right. *You* tell her we won't help."

I thought of the fear in her eyes and stood up. "I'll see if I can find him."

As I drove across the bridge into New Jersey, I thought about the fifty thousand dollars.

In some circles it wasn't a great deal of money. We'd picked up pushers carrying that much in a cardboard box. I'd seen the equivalent in chips on the table in a high-stakes poker game. And I knew people who could write a check for that amount without blinking.

But for the Davoris it would represent a monumental sum, and I had seen how a heavy debt could strain family ties to the breaking point and make people old before their time.

Three hours later I phoned Mandola.

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"You were right about Davori trying to hit a home run."

"What did he do?"

"The manager of the bank was very cooperative. When Maria called him this morning to tell him Dennis had disappeared, he naturally checked into Davori's personal-loan accounts. As assistant manager he was authorized to make loans up to ten thousand dollars. The manager, whose name is Jenkins, found that a good many checks had been sent to post-office-box addresses. That was a little odd, so he scrutinized those applications and discovered they were products of Davori's imagination. He's made loans to himself for quite a few thousand over the last several months. None were delinquent in their payments, so the bank had no reason to check them out, but it's pretty clear he was using one of them to make payments on the others."

"How much did he get away with?"

"It might go as high as forty or fifty thousand. Jenkins isn't sure yet. I also spoke to a woman who did Davori's secretarial work. She told me that more than once he said he'd like to go to the Southwest—Texas or Arizona or New Mexico. He felt there was more opportunity there. Draw your own conclusions."

There was a silence.

"Has the bank reported the theft?"

"No. They're waiting for all the facts and figures. He's still not wanted, so the local cops can't put a bulletin out on him. We can check the airlines, but I have an idea that if he went, he drove."

"But we really don't know."

"All I know is, according to Jenkins, he turned left instead of right last evening when he pulled out of the parking lot. I'm not that familiar with this area, but I do know that if you turn left you can pick up the New Jersey Turnpike in a few miles and head south, which is as good a way as any to get to Texas." I waited. "Well, what do we tell Maria?"

"We're all too old to play games. Tell her the truth."

Twenty minutes later I was in the outskirts of Murray Hill, one of the small towns that grew up around the business district.

I found the address with no trouble. The house was old, painted white, big and wood-framed and sedate—the kind people with money bought sixty years ago. I mounted the steps to the broad veranda, but the door opened before I reached it and she stood there, a tentative smile of

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welcome on her face but the worried look still in her eyes.

The ceilings inside were high, the rooms huge and well furnished, and if there was one word to describe the decor it was solidity.

"Mother's asleep," she said. A young man, big through the shoulders, his high-cheekboned face resembling hers, joined her before the fireplace.

"My brother John," she said.

We shook hands. "You might want to sit down," I told them.

She shook her head, her voice resigned. "He's dead, isn't he?"

"Not to my knowledge. What I did find is that he's been stealing from the bank to the tune of fifty thousand dollars and had been speaking of going to Texas."

The shock stunned her for a long moment. John said, "I always knew he was no good."

I explained it all. When I finished, she shook her head. "I can't believe that."

"I can," said John.

"We must find him," Mrs. Davori said firmly.

"All right," I said. "This is a big country but unless it's done right it's hard to disappear in it. Once the bank files charges every cop between here and the Southwest will be looking for him, and eventually someone will turn him up. But right now I can't do much, nor can Mandola, no matter how much we'd like to help you."

"Even if he took the money he wouldn't have just disappeared without saying something to me," she insisted. "Some excuse, some lie, so I wouldn't worry—even if it was just a phone call saying he expected not to be home for dinner."

Sure, I thought, but if he decided to run out on her Davori wouldn't have been the first man to take off without informing his wife. But his wife wouldn't believe that because she didn't want to believe it.

"Maybe he tried to reach you and you were out," I said.

She shook her head. "One of us is always here because of Mother. The phone rang only once last night. I was sure it was Dennis, but—"

"—it wasn't," said John. "I was up late studying for an exam so I took the call. It was a wrong number."

"He would have called if he could," his sister said stubbornly.

I didn't want to argue with her because it would have been useless, yet I couldn't tell her bluntly there was nothing I could do—first, because

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she was a friend of Mandola's, and second, because if there was anything I could do to erase the pain in her eyes I would.

"What kind of a car did your husband drive?"

"An old brown-and-white Chevrolet that always gave him trouble. That was the first thing I thought of when he didn't come home. But if the car had broken down he would have called me."

"You don't think the car could make it to Texas?"

"There were some mornings it didn't make it to the bank. He hated that car, but we couldn't afford a new one."

The money he stole from the bank would have solved that problem, I thought.

"Where else could he have gone?"

"I don't have the faintest idea."

John shrugged. "What difference does it make? He's gone. And good riddance."

I went to the window and looked out at the close-clipped lawn and the tidy, tree-lined street.

With a maximum of $10,000 available to him at one crack, Davori must have been milking the bank with phony loans over a period of time, probably months, to get up to forty or fifty thousand—and unless he let it accumulate, he really wouldn't have had the money in one lump sum. It sounded instead as if he wrote those loans to finance himself when he needed money. But for what? Since he couldn't spend it without answering questions, what had he done with it? Where did he go on those Thursday nights? What did he do? Because if he *was* spending the money, that was when he had to do it. During the rest of the week he was at home in the evenings.

So what it came down to was those Thursday nights.

And then Mandola's words came back—*"The kind who's always looking to hit a home run . . ."*

How did a man like Davori hit a home run?

I turned to Maria. "Did your husband ever gamble?"

She stared at me. "I suppose he did."

"Do you have a recent picture of him?"

"Not too recent, but he hasn't changed much since it was taken." She brought the picture. "What are you going to do now?"

"Take a drive to check out a hunch."

"May I come?"

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"It might take some time."

"John will stay with Mother."

I headed the car south.

"You aren't telling me where we're going," she commented.

"We'll be there in forty-five minutes. You won't need any explanations then."

When the skyline of Atlantic City gleamed on the horizon in the late-afternoon sun, she said, "I see."

"Some of it," I said. "Not all of it."

We stopped at the first casino we came to, went inside, and located the floor manager, a young man with a dapper moustache, wearing a tuxedo. I showed him Davori's picture. "Have you see this man in here?"

He nodded. "Usually on Thursdays, but he was here last night."

"Did he bet big, do you know?"

"Not the heaviest, but not the quarter slots either. He generally goes for roulette."

"I suppose he loses."

"For the most part he does. But last night he had a hot streak. He hit about fifty thousand before he cooled off. He took a few thousand and a chit for the balance, then came back later and filled an attaché case with the cash. We told him that wasn't exactly wise, but he insisted."

We stopped at other casinos with the same questions. He had lost a few thousand in the second, but his streak had returned in the third, allowing him to stuff another fifty thousand in the attaché case.

The sensible thing to do would have been to accept checks, but, checks or cash, he had finally hit his home run.

We strolled along the Boardwalk until we found a bench and sat looking out over the blackness of the ocean.

"So he stole from the bank to finance his gambling," she said.

"And it finally paid off."

"But where is he?"

"We'll find him. With that much money he just might have gone to Texas after all."

Her voice was suddenly angry. "With that much money he should have reimbursed the bank!"

I nodded, but I was thinking that if he had returned the money he wouldn't have his home run. A double perhaps, but that's all. And if he'd

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taken the remaining fifty thousand and paid off the mortgage, he'd have had nothing left.

Her quick anger had dissipated. "Money or no money, I can't believe he'd leave me without a word. He couldn't have been that unhappy because I insisted on living with my mother."

"It probably had nothing to do with you," I said. "I understand he always wanted to be successful. With the money, he could at least pretend for a time. Right now, all that money in his hands is more important than anything else. He has his dream."

"You're telling me that a hundred thousand dollars is more important to him than I am."

"Come on," I said. We picked up my car and I began cruising.

I found the brown-and-white Chevrolet parked before a motel on the edge of the city.

The clerk recognized the face in the photo and gave us the room number.

The doorknob had a DO NOT DISTURB sign hanging from the knob.

I rapped loudly. No answer. I pounded. Still no answer.

A hundred thousand in cash in an attaché case, I thought.

"Get the clerk," I told Maria. "Tell him your husband is in the room but doesn't answer the door and you want him to bring the key."

Davori was sprawled across the bed, seemingly asleep, but when I moved closer I saw the stain on his chest.

The clerk led Maria back to his office and called the police.

I examined the room carefully. Davori hadn't been in bed when he was shot. His suit coat was draped over a chair and there was nothing in the pockets. There was no sign of an attaché case.

The police thought the same thing I did. He should never have been walking around with that much cash.

As I drove Maria home, she stared straight ahead, her face white in the darkness.

"He didn't come home because he was dead," she said. "It was what I thought from the beginning. He would never have left me."

I didn't say anything. Davori might have been a great many things but he wasn't stupid. Yet he had allowed someone into the room and had turned his back on whoever it was, allowing that person to slug him in

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the back of the head, probably with the gun, and then put a bullet in his heart after having first held a pillow over the muzzle to muffle the sound.

Which meant that it had been no stranger.

He had been alone at all three casinos we'd checked out. Back at the motel office I had asked the clerk for the record of any phone calls Davori had made. There were only two. I'd copied down the numbers, gone out to the phone booth, told the operator who I was, and asked her for the names and addresses for both.

Maria's brother met us at the door.

She turned and held out her hand formally. "Thank you, Sergeant Cole." There was a sadness and a hurt in her eyes and voice as though she'd been punished for something she hadn't done. Then she excused herself and went upstairs.

I told the brother all about it.

"A hundred thousand dollars in cash?" He whistled softly. "No wonder someone shot him."

"What did you do with the money?" I said.

He stared. "Me?"

"It's simple enough. That was no wrong number you took last night. That was your brother-in-law. Your sister is right. He wouldn't have run out on her without calling with some sort of excuse, so he called here after he rented that motel room. He told you he'd won the hundred thousand and wasn't coming back. So you hopped in your car and drove there, killed him, took the money, and got back before anyone knew you were gone."

He laughed. "You're crazy."

"It won't be hard to prove. The easiest thing for you to do is let me drive you down to the police station and get it over with."

He tried to face me down, but it was over and he knew it. His shoulders sagged. "It wasn't the money," he said. "You should have heard him. He was laughing. He was through with this crumby place, he said, and with my sweet, perfect sister. He was going to have a good time and we could all go to hell. I couldn't let him do that to her. He wasn't much, but she loved him."

A small sound made us both turn. She was standing on the stairs.

John's eyes held an appeal.

"I did it for you. He was leaving you."

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"No," she said. She was hugging herself as if she was cold. "He would never have left me."

We all try to escape reality when it becomes too much of a burden. Her husband had thought he could do it with money; she was doing it with memories. How long she could hold out I didn't know, but I hoped she'd never find out about that second phone call.

It had been to an airline to place a first-class reservation on their noon flight to Dallas.

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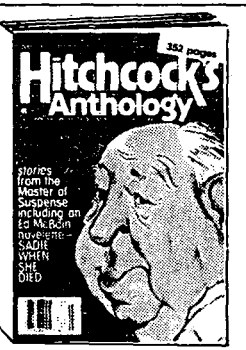
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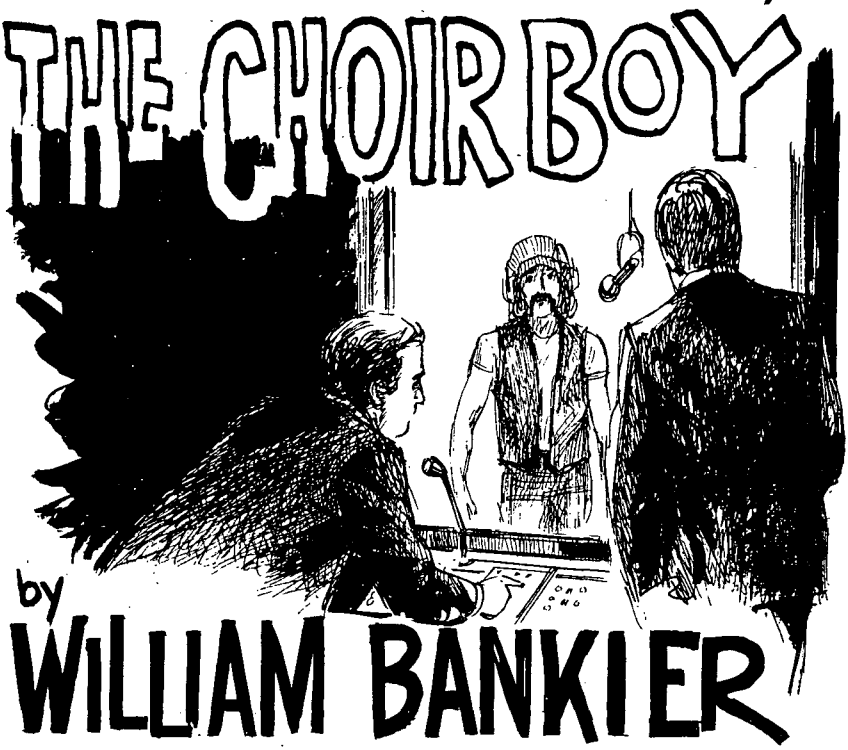
The musician said Latchford looked like an angry Muppet . . .

THE CHOIRBOY



by WILLIAM BANKIER

The musicians had taped their tracks and departed the studio, heading for wherever musicians go in Toronto on a July morning. Now Barry Latchford was alone in the soundproof room, adding his voice to the pre-recorded background.

In the control room, Norman Inch pressed the intercom button. "You're a disappointment, Barry," he said.

Latchford was a sinewy man in his thirties with shoulder-length blond

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hair and a sinister-looking moustache. Padded earphones gripped his head. He wore a striped freight-engineer's cap to go with his vagabond outfit of leather vest and stovepipe jeans. His boots were army surplus—parachute corps.

Barry Latchford resembled more a villain out of a spaghetti Western than the best singer of TV and radio commercial music in Canada. The drummer on the gig had been awarded the laugh of the morning when he said Latchford looked like a tall angry Muppet.

When the producer from the advertising agency told him he was a disappointment, Latchford sat erect while a jolt of fear emptied his eyes. "What's the problem?" He was perfectionist enough to believe that criticism was always justified. Once, years ago, he had become a hermit for weeks, practicing his scales and breathing to be ready for the December night when the choir would perform the *Messiah*.

Behind the glass, Inch put a hand on the shoulder of his companion, Steve Pullman, the copywriter. "We were hoping we could stretch this session into an extra day," he said, his voice booming through the speaker. "But if you keep delivering the goods on the first take, we'll be on our way back to Montreal tonight."

Latchford relaxed. He slipped off the stool, eased the "cans" from his head, and hung them on the music stand.

"My wife complains about the same thing," he said. "I'm fabulous but I'm a little too quick."

"We'll hear a playback of everything so far," Inch proclaimed, "then we'll buy you a drink."

They went into a place near the studio. After drinking and talking baseball for a few minutes, Pullman said to Inch, "Tell Barry the idea. Let's not waste time."

"Mysterioso," Latchford said, taking an invisible sip of whisky.

"We write songs," Inch said dogmatically. "You've never heard of us because our commercial success to date has been the square root of nothing at all."

"Welcome to the club."

"Come on, you were in the charts with 'Apple Dreams' a couple of years ago."

"The Canadian charts—and even that was a struggle. I've never made it with a pop single in the U.S."

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"So let's get together and create some prosperity," Pullman said. "Tell him the idea, Norman."

"The idea is you come down to Montreal and record one of our songs."

Latchford could feel remorse rising about him like ground mist in a horror film. God protect him from amateur songwriters. "Cutting a side is an expensive business," he said in the gloomy voice of a businessman.

Pullman's impatience was beginning to peak. "Will you tell him the idea, Norman?"

"We do it through my company, Inchworm Productions. The recording studio will be Carlo's—he owes us a couple of favors, so there'll be no studio charges. As for musicians, we do it on half scale. If the song takes off, everybody gets paid."

Latchford looked for a way out. "I'll have to check it out with Carol. My wife—she's my business manager."

"Do it and let us know as soon as you can." Inch directed glances around the room like a marked man watching out for assassins.

"Even if you make the record and it's O.K.," Latchford persisted, "you're only halfway there. If the stations won't play it, you're dead."

"Leave that to me," Pullman said. "I worked for three years as a DJ at CBAY."

"Baytown?" Years ago, on vacation, Latchford had spent an uneventful thirty seconds driving through the town.

"The Voice of Crystal Bay," Pullman intoned, cupping his ear pseudo-professionally. "I know how the hit parade can be rigged."

"Providing it's a good song," Latchford said. "You can't sell garbage."

"We won't give you garbage to record," Inch said patiently. "Be a good boy and check with your wife."

Carol Latchford sat at the kitchen table in one of the old cinema seats Barry had bought when the neighborhood Palace gave up and became a block of shops. Four maroon-plush recliners were now bolted to the vinyl floor, two on either side of the low pine table.

"I think you should record their song," Carol said. She was drinking beer from a bottle and smoking a thin brown cigarette.

Latchford was playing around with a wok on the gas stove, throwing in green peppers and mushrooms and slivers of chicken, being a virtuoso chef. "These are two little businessmen from the minor leagues," he said. "The writer is from Baytown—do you believe that? It's amateur night."

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"What are you doing otherwise that's so important?" Carol was a short plump woman in her late twenties. She had a pussycat mouth, a turned-up nose, and green eyes with brows that arched in permanent astonishment. If faces had to be assigned countries, hers was Irish. "Something may come of it. You never can tell."

"You don't know these guys," Latchford insisted.

"Take me to meet them then," she said, finishing her beer, dropping the empty bottle into the case on the floor at her feet and flicking out a full one with a deft backhand movement.

Latchford frowned at the hiss of the bottlecap. "Could you manage to be sober if I did?"

"I can't remember the last time you took me somewhere."

"That's where you have the advantage. I *can* remember."

"Loosen up then. Have a drink with me—we'll have some fun."

"You call this fun?"

Steve Pullman was setting out a meager bar in Inch's hotel room: a bottle of Scotch, a bottle of gin, some tonic, four glasses, and a bucket of ice. "Why couldn't they ask us up to their place?" he whined. He felt poor, as if he was back in his parents' shabby house near the bay.

"His wife probably wanted to come out," Inch said. He was accustomed to pacifying his partner. Writers were all the same—if they weren't bitching about how terrible everything was, they were going over the top with enthusiasm over some minor success.

"I don't think he likes our idea," Pullman said.

"Then we'll sell it to him."

"Maybe we should line up another singer."

"Latchford's the best. We agreed we'd start with the best."

"I'm worried about how we finish," Pullman said grimly.

The Latchfords arrived in a mood of manufactured euphoria. Carol was wearing a crimson-silk jersey dress and charcoal nylons above plastic shoes without backs. Pullman fell in love with her legs immediately. He ordered the beer she requested and, when it came and he had opened one, placed himself where he could see every one of the frequent crossings of those smooth, shiny legs.

Everybody except Latchford drank a lot and the party was a reasonable success. By midnight when they were devouring room-service sandwiches and Carol was into her seventh pint of beer, Pullman was referring to

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her as the small-town girl. She was like the girls he remembered from the tea dances in the gymnasium at Baytown High School. Carol was flattered. "Let this guy write your lyrics, Barry," she said. "He's a magician with words."

Latchford tossed his head back, pretending to laugh without actually producing any sound.

In the taxi on the way home he grumbled, "I should go see a psychiatrist, agreeing to do this."

"We'll go to Montreal. We'll have some fun for a few days," Carol said. Her head was back on the upholstery, her eyes closed. "What can you lose?"

"*You'll* have fun. I saw you encouraging that bush-league lover. I should put you across my knee."

"Right now, I'd be grateful for even that."

Flora Inch, Norman's wife, selected the song that Latchford would record. She came out of her study in the bungalow across the river in St. Lambert with the portable cassette player in one hand and a page of notes in the other. "Here's my choice," she said.

" 'Summer Silence,' " Norman read from the list. He tried not to look too pleased. "I like that one too."

Flora moved a flower pot so she could perch on a window ledge. Her broad shape obscured most of the view of the Montreal highrise panorama in the distance. Richelieu, a tiny dog of indeterminate breed, limped from the kitchen, saw the woman he loved, took a skittering run, and leaped onto a lap that barely existed. Flora saved the dog from falling and cuddled it to her tank-topped bosom. She had the shoulders of a Channel swimmer, the cropped hair of a woman who wants a rest. Her face was as pretty as a doll's.

"Richie, Richie," she crooned. Then, after a pause in which her eyes went out of focus, "The lyric could use a little fixing. Would you like me to do it?"

"I don't want a hassle with Steve."

"You want a good lyric. Steve Pullman has blind spots. I know—I wrote copy in the next office for three years."

"You may be right, but leave it alone. We have a delicate operation here. Stay home and write your novel."

"God help me, I've written it three times. Let me up."

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"You're the one who cried out for artistic freedom. Write the book."

"I'm coming to that recording session. I'm not going to miss the rematch between Latchford's wife and our little Stevie!"

Carlo's Recording Center was a compact set of rooms engineered and hand-built by the owner. Carlo sat at the console, straight-backed, Spanish eyes alert, watching Barry Latchford through the glass partition as if the singer might fly at any minute and it would be his responsibility to trap him in a net. Norman Inch lounged beside Carlo in the producer's chair.

Steve Pullman and the two women were crowded onto the visitors' settee. Flora Inch had always been like a sister to Steve, taking him under her wing on his first day at the ad agency. She sat on his left now, bending occasionally to feed a chocolate tidbit to the carpet remnant she called a dog. "This is your best work, Steve," she commented after the first take. "Be proud of this song."

On his right, Carol Latchford crossed her legs, bringing a stiletto heel down across Pullman's trousers. "Sorry," she said, brushing her hand firmly and repeatedly over his calf.

By the third take, everybody agreed Latchford had done his best. Carlo had a paying client coming in, so the session had to end. "Everybody come over to St. Lambert," Flora said briskly, scooping up Richelieu. "Can we all squeeze into my car?"

They straggled out of the control room. "Looks like you're on my lap, Carol," Pullman said.

Inch directed a weak grin at Barry Latchford, who looked right through him as he unwrapped two sticks of gum and stuffed them into his mouth.

Flora Inch's food was late but meanwhile the wine flowed and the house filled with the aroma of roasting beef and salad dressing spiked with garlic and dry mustard. When the inebriated guests sat down at the table and fell on the meal, they all told the hostess it was the most delicious they had ever eaten.

"Have some more beef, Steve," Flora said. She was drifting to and from the kitchen beyond a waist-high divider lined with a cherry cheesecake and a pecan pie. "I don't want to end up feeding sirloin to that piggy Richelieu."

"You aren't eating, Barry," Inch scolded the singer.

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"I'm always down after a session," Latchford mumbled, looking into space. "Don't mind me."

"Don't mind him," Carol echoed. "Barry-baby will retire to the wilderness shortly and communicate with his inner spirit. One Magnificat, two Te Deums, and a fast chorus of Panis Angelicus, and he'll be as good as new."

"Don't give that lady any more to drink," Latchford said with a false smile.

"Are you a choirboy?" Flora asked. "I used to pipe away with the altos at St. James the Apostle on Ste. Catherine Street. If this was Saturday night, we could drive over tomorrow morning for matins."

"I wouldn't mind that," Latchford said, his pale eyes staring through the window into the twinkling black mass of the Montreal skyline.

In the weeks that followed, after the Barry Latchford recording of "Summer Silence" was released, some of the euphoria began to wear off. They had a good song, but pessimism arose as they listened to it for the 150th time. Inch lifted the tone arm. "Where do we go from here?" he said. They were using the agency studio for their private business.

"To church," Pullman said dryly, "like your wife keeps saying. Only we go to pray, not to sing."

"Pray, hell. The whole idea, *your* idea, is that we don't leave things to chance."

"It's in the lap of the gods."

"You were going to rig the charts. Line up a crowd of little girls to phone the stations all day asking for Barry Latchford's new single."

"It isn't that easy. Latchford's nobody to these kids. They only request what everybody else is requesting—Michael Jackson, the Bee Gees."

"Pay them then."

"It gets complicated. What if some parents wonder where the kids are getting the money? Our involvement comes out, Latchford looks terrible, and so do Inch and Pullman."

"Why didn't you think of this in the beginning?"

"I was being optimistic. Forgive me."

The telephone rang beside Inch. He picked it up. "Studio."

"A call from Toronto, Mr. Inch. Barry Latchford."

"Put him on." He said to Pullman, "It's Russ Columbo. Our troubles are just beginning."

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Pullman closed his eyes and sighed.

"We were just talking about you, Barry. Did you get the record I sent you?" Inch listened for half a minute. "Feel free to do whatever you can to promote it up there. Meanwhile, we're going ahead as discussed." When the call was finished, Inch let the telephone drop into its cradle as if it was something wet.

"He's over the moon," he said. "We'd better produce some evidence that we're trying to sell his song."

In Toronto, Barry Latchford went through the house looking for Carol. He found her in the television room. The set was playing with the sound off. She was placed in a chair in viewing position, trying to read a newspaper by the light from the screen. Her knitting rested on the carpet. Beside it was an ashtray full of cigarette ends and an empty beer bottle.

"Your trouble is you don't have anything to do," he said.

"Wrong," she said. "It says here Imperial Tobacco and Molson's Brewery have increased production. I'll never catch up."

He sat on the floor. "That sounds like an unhappy woman."

"You always had a good ear."

He took the newspaper from her and snapped off the television, leaving only one source of light—the lamp in the hall outside the open door. "I really don't like to see you unhappy."

"I'm sorry. I can't please you with satisfaction I don't possess." She lit another cigarette. "It probably isn't your fault. Different things make us happy. I like dance halls—they call them discos now—and I hardly ever see the inside of one. I'd like to wear some of those wild leather clothes the kids are into, but you'd think I was crazy."

He looked away, hoping she wouldn't go on. If she turned herself into one of those freaks he couldn't imagine how he'd react.

"You fooled me. First time I saw you singing in the club I thought you were a swinger. We should never have got married." She blew a fierce shaft of smoke.

"Are you in love with that writer character?"

Carol picked up her knitting, held the needles poised, and stared at the particle of space between their tips. "Steve Pullman? Am I in love with him? Not quite."

"He never takes his eyes off you."

"Better not say that. You're making me all excited."

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"He wants to take you away to Baytown or wherever the hell he comes from."

"Small-town bliss. Now there's a dream."

Latchford put a firm hand on his wife's knee. "Don't leave me, Carol."

"Message noted," she said, and the knitting needles began to click like a machine.

The Montreal promotion never did get off the ground. But as things turned out Pullman's failure to deliver didn't matter. Latchford took his copy of "Summer Silence" to a DJ friend at the top station in Toronto. He loved it, played it three times on one morning show, and the telephone began to ring. The process didn't stop for two months as the song reached the top of the charts and stayed there. The distributor told the factory to press another 50,000 and began spreading the word to radio stations and dealers across Canada. He also telephoned a connection in New York. They had a phenomenon on their hands—a song that couldn't fail to make it big.

Indian summer is always a special time in Montreal. Bonfires send pungent smoke trailing upward into hazy blue skies. The bittersweet afternoons are silent in memory of the days of warmth and comfort that are gone forever.

Barry and Carol Latchford came down for the celebration at the Inch residence on the south shore. It was clearly time to open the champagne; the record was now the top-selling single in the history of Canadian pop music. Better still, a deal was set for distribution in the States. Latchford's dream had come true.

The party was one of those Saturday affairs where the few people not invited turn up anyway, bringing bottles as admission. Every room was crowded, as were the back garden, the front lawn, the stairs, the garage, even the cars parked in the driveway. All the doors were open, the music system was on full volume; the sophisticated party dominated the entire neighborhood.

Norman Inch finally managed to maneuver his wife out of the kitchen and into a quiet corner. "I'm worried about Steve," he said.

"I told him not to follow wine with beer."

"I mean the way he keeps after Carol Latchford. Barry's starting to look at him."

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Flora's eyes grew large and innocent. "So?"

"So all we need is a fist fight between the guest of honor and the lyricist."

"It might be just what the party needs."

"I don't know why I bother talking to you."

"People should be allowed to go where their actions take them. It helps the plot develop."

"These are not characters in your bloody novel."

"Real people can live or die just like fictional characters." Flora blinked at her husband. "And I don't like your tone of voice. My novel one day will surpass any of your so-called successes with chintzy songs about summer love."

By two o'clock on Sunday morning the police had paid two polite visits, the music was now turned low, most of the guests had gone home, and those few who remained were caged inside the house. The Latchfords had come with luggage for a long weekend. Barry had removed his turtleneck sweater and suede jacket some time after midnight and was now wearing his pajama top. He was sitting on a couch beside his hostess, swallowing cognac from a tumbler.

"We've got to do it, Barry," Flora said. She crossed her legs and Richelieu repositioned himself on her lap without opening his eyes.

"Do what?" Latchford was looking through a doorway at his wife dancing with Pullman in the next room. Carol was a lot shorter than Steve; her cheek was pressed against his chest, her skirt riding up in back, showing plenty of rounded calf. Pullman's chin rested on the top of her curly head. He saw Latchford watching them and gave him a sleepy grin.

"We have to go to St. James the Apostle tomorrow morning," Flora said. "We have to show them how to sing."

"I haven't been to church in ten years," he said.

Latchford and his brothers had been the foundation of the choir for a long time. When they matured and went professional, their gospel quartet was good enough to hold a radio series on the Dominion Network. They even did a summer series on television. His chance to go single, to do club dates, had seemed like the beginning of a fabulous career. Now, even with the U.S. hit in the pipeline, he found himself longing for the uncomplicated delight of standing around the piano with his brothers rehearsing "This Little Light of Mine."

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"You haven't been to church in ten years? I haven't been in twenty. I'd say we're both overdue." Flora followed Barry's gaze to see what was distracting him. She raised her glass and her voice. "Yoo-hoo, Stevie! Here's to young love!"

Later, Inch was unloading a tray of glasses in the kitchen. The party had gone quiet. Suddenly Latchford's voice rang out in a tone heavy with warning. "*Steve!*"

The command was so threatening Inch's heart began to pound. He moved quickly from the kitchen into the room that had been cleared for dancing. Nobody was there. Through the doorway he could see a tableau at the couch in the front room. Latchford had risen, his glass in one hand, his eyes focused on the French doors leading to the garden. Flora was holding a restraining hand on his wrist while she pressed Richelieu down on her lap. The dog's ears were up—he was tense, alert.

After this frozen moment, things began to move quickly. Latchford broke away, dropping the glass on the carpet and vanishing swiftly through the French doors. Flora struggled up and the dog went scampering.

"What's happening?"

"Steve and Carol stopped dancing and went out back."

Inch showed his wife a hopeless face. "I'm not happy stopping fights."

"Steve has it coming. He's been socking it in with that little slut all evening."

Carol Latchford's voice rang out in the garden. "Don't you start, Barry—I'm warning you!" Then she screamed. "Stop! Somebody stop him!"

When Inch reached the end of the garden he could hardly see in the darkness. He could faintly make out Latchford's pajama-clad arm rising and falling as he knelt across Steve Pullman. Forcing himself to intervene, he put a hand on Barry's shoulder. It was like touching a button on a machine. The beating ended abruptly and Latchford sat back on his haunches.

"Call the police," Carol said. Her voice was outraged, like that of a parent who has seen a child go too far.

Inch's eyes were accustomed to the darkness now. He leaned down and looked at what had been Steve Pullman's face. "We need an ambulance," he said.

Latchford got up and walked away. He discovered he was holding a

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rock in his hand. He let it fall. Behind him he could hear the panic, the excitement, people running into each other, voices shouting, somebody trying to start a car and calling a girl to come on because he wanted to get going.

His arms ached. He remembered the day when he was ten years old and he tried to walk home from the supermarket carrying two paper bags of groceries against his chest. The bags seemed light enough at the start but before he was halfway home he knew he couldn't support them longer than another few seconds. There was noplace to set them down and he felt such a sense of failure and embarrassment he began to cry. When he finally made it to the house, after spilling the contents of one of the bags in the gutter, his arms throbbed for the rest of the afternoon.

The lights of Inch's house were getting farther away. Latchford turned and blundered back through a low hedge, across a flower bed. He went inside and hurried up the stairs to the guest room, where he stripped off the blood-spattered pajama top and changed into a shirt. He paused, then felt impelled to put on a necktie and his suede jacket.

As he was leaving the house by the front door, he was confronted by Carol. Her face was streaked with tears and dirt. "Where are you going? The police are coming."

"Bye-bye, Carol."

"You're crazy."

"I told you to stop fooling around."

"Why did you keep hitting him? Once was enough."

"Why do you drink so much?"

She held him by the arm as he tried to walk away. He twisted free, feeling skin from his forearm collecting under her fingernails as he released himself. "Feel better?"

"Where are you going?"

Latchford had no idea.

He followed curving streets and found himself close to the river. The metropolis lay on the other side, humming, vibrating like a starship just landed after a voyage across the universe. To his right, a gigantic bridge connected the south shore with the city. He began walking in that direction.

Halfway across the bridge, he stopped and stared out at the night past a barrier of steel struts and girders. He was like a prisoner in a cage, but

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he felt safe, protected rather than confined. The considerable amount of alcohol he had consumed was beginning to wear off. Latchford realized now, for the first time, that he had deliberately killed Steve Pullman, beaten him to death, murdered him. He tried to recall the event but it wasn't clear in his mind. He had a suspicion he had enjoyed doing it.

Carol's question had been "Why did you keep hitting him?" Latchford stood in his cage and tried to think of an answer. Hardly a day went by in which he was not tense as a spring, racing from here to there, doing what everybody else wanted, singing their nonsensical jingles, taking their money and their praise when he knew he was guilty of conspiring to produce rubbish.

What should he be doing then? What sort of life would have converted him into a satisfied man who did not beat rivals to death at parties? The days of singing with his brothers—were those not happy times? Latchford tried to recapture the feeling that went with standing around the piano in the family living room, harmonizing gospel hymns—"Throw Out the Lifeline," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The memory of the music brought tears to his eyes but he could identify no sense of inner peace from that faraway life.

Perhaps he had always been driven to go farther and try new things. Maybe that was why he'd left the quartet and pursued a commercial career. Latchford didn't really understand why he did what he did. For as long as he could remember, he had been carrying a giant rage. Maybe he deserved credit for containing it till now. The question was not really why he had killed but how everybody else kept the blood off their hands.

A giant bus frightened him as it hissed its brakes going past on the road behind him. With his heart pounding, Latchford began walking toward the city.

The police arrived at the Inch residence promptly and were disturbed to learn that the assailant had been allowed to walk away from the scene. They took a description and spent half an hour checking out the neighborhood gardens with flashlights.

"He's miles away by now," one of them said with satisfaction as they slammed the doors of the police car and followed the ambulance carrying Pullman's body.

Nobody slept. By nine-thirty in the morning Flora had washed three loads of dishes. Carol was drying and stacking. Norman was sitting at the

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table, smoking, staring out the window at the glorious morning, shaking his head solemnly every now and then, like a baseball pitcher shrugging off his catcher's signals. They were all waiting for the phone to ring.

At last Carol said, "Can we have the radio on?"

Norman reached out and snapped the switch of the transistor. An announcer read the weather, gave the time, then an organ played an introduction and a lugubrious male voice began to sing.

"Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer
That calls us from a world of care . . ."

Flora raised her head from the detergent bubbles. "I know where Barry is," she said. "He's in church."

"He hasn't gone since we've been married," Carol said.

"I told him last night about St. James the Apostle." She began drying her hands.

"I'll get the car out," Norman said.

"No, I'll drive myself. You haven't shaved."

"Wouldn't it be better to call the police?" Carol said.

Flora stared at her, then turned to the door. "Wash your face, child. We're going to find your husband and bring him home."

In the car, Carol said, "I guess I sounded inhuman back there."

"My husband has never killed anybody," Flora said, "so I don't know how I'd behave in your place." She gunned illegally past a line of cars on the bridge. "As far as I *know* he's never killed anybody."

"It can't get any worse for me. I've been miserable for most of the last six years. Barry is bound to go to jail for a long time and I know I'll be happier without him." They were off the bridge now, moving through the narrow streets of east Montreal. "I'm a bitch, eh?"

Flora gave Carol a speculative glance. "Yes, I'd say a bitch."

Parking spaces were plentiful on a Sunday morning. Flora stopped on Crescent Street, locked the car, then led the way at a fast pace toward the greystone church. The fine weather showed no signs of breaking. Flora's cream straw hat sparkled in the sunlight. She had offered to lend a hat to Carol but the Torontonian declined and wrapped her head in a scarf. Small-town girl, was Flora's assessment of that decision.

They were just in time for the service. The church was filled. An usher

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helped them cram into a pew near the back. Flora, a choir-trained Anglican, genuflected and said a silent prayer, then sat back. In every direction she saw massed heads and shoulders. Carol leaned close to whisper, "We'll never find him, even if he *is* here."

"Don't worry—he's here."

The service began with the choir chanting what to Flora were familiar notes, but there was no response from the congregation so she remained silent. Then the minister announced the opening hymn and as the organ played the seventeenth-century tune, "Nun Danket," the congregation and choir rose, shuffling and coughing.

"Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices . . ."

It was at the beginning of the second verse that she realized something unusual was happening. The congregation had fallen silent and many of the choir members had their eyes raised to the balcony. Above her, out of Flora's sight, Barry Latchford was singing as if it had been rehearsed this way.

"Oh, may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us . . ."

Gradually the choir stopped singing until, by the last quatrain, it was Barry alone accompanied by the organ. His tone was fuller than anything Flora had heard in Carlo's studio all those months ago. She felt she was listening to a different voice.

"And keep us in His grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next."

The women waited for Latchford in the sunlight outside the church. He made no attempt to walk away. He was unshaven and red-eyed but he was smiling. This boyish smile was different from the cynical one Flora had come to think of as typically Latchford. Carol didn't move to him nor did he approach her.

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Flora watched them for a few seconds, squinting into the sun. "Let's go home," she said at last.

"Are the police there?"

"No. I thought we'd have lunch, you can clean up and rest for a while, then we'll call them."

He nodded. In the car he said, "Not a bad ending."

"What ending?" Flora said. "You won't be in forever. You'll come out and start singing the proper music, the way you sang this morning."

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"I killed that man. All he did was play a little game with Carol and I took his life. That can't be right."

The police took Latchford away at four. By five, Carol had departed in a taxi for the airport, refusing a lift. The house was tidy—Norman had been busy. He came into Flora's study carrying two drinks; she was in her swivel chair, staring at the typewriter.

Norman handed her a glass and sat down. "I wouldn't want to go through *that* again," he said.

"You won't. Not with Steve, anyway."

"I could do without the smart answers. He was my partner."

"You'll find somebody better. Carol will settle down with a small-town boy who suits her. Latchford will sing the roof off the prison chapel. Everybody's ahead."

"Except Steve Pullman."

The telephone rang and Norman went down the hall to answer it. When he came back a couple of minutes later, the glass in his hand was empty. "That was somebody from the police. Latchford is dead."

"I don't believe it." Flora looked stunned. "What happened?"

"They didn't handcuff him because he was so quiet, the way he gave himself up. In the station he knocked over a cop, managed to get hold of his gun, and turned it on himself."

Flora reached under the desk and lifted Richelieu from the basket. She cradled him on her lap, rocking back and forth in the swivel chair.

"That's how right you were about Latchford," Norman said bitterly. "I wonder about the rest of us."

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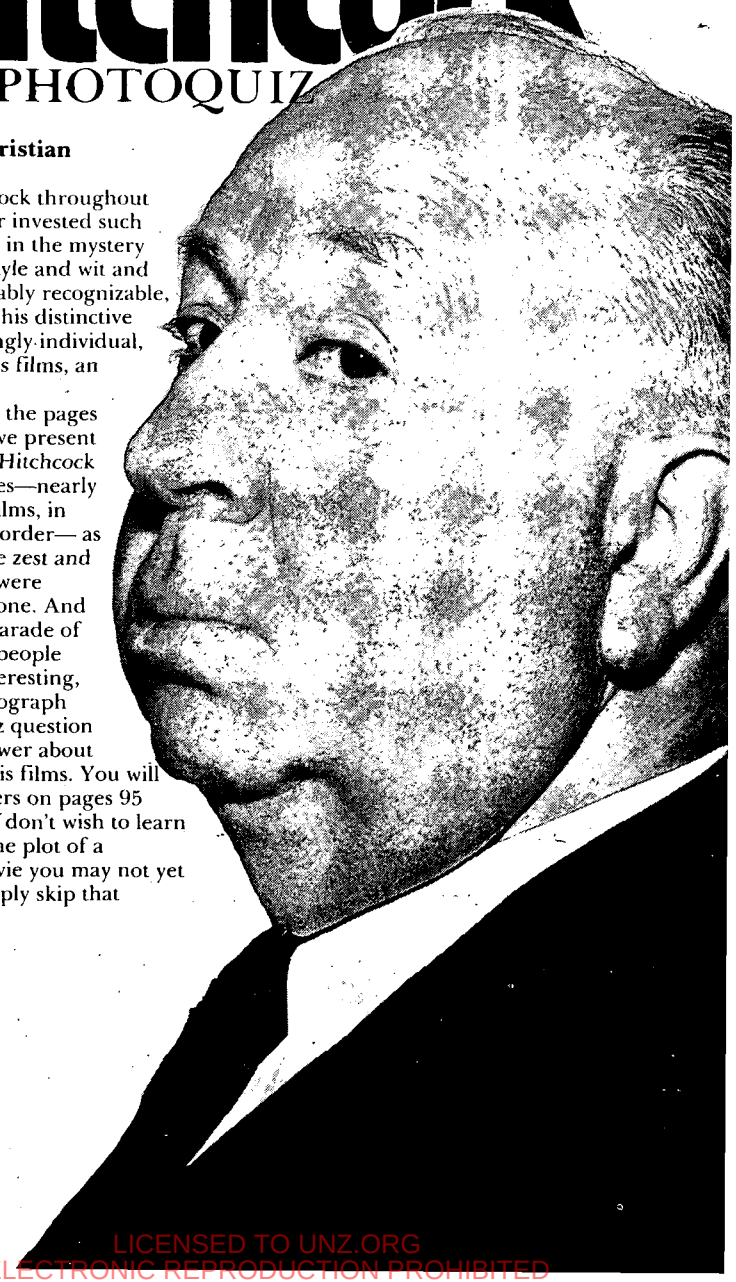
ALFRED Hitchcock PHOTOQUIZ

by Peter Christian

Alfred Hitchcock throughout his long career invested such visual mastery in the mystery film that his style and wit and *look* are invariably recognizable, memorable. This distinctive quality, glowingly individual, shines in all his films, an unmistakable trademark. In the pages which follow we present a portfolio of Hitchcock motion pictures—nearly all his major films, in chronological order— as a tribute to the zest and the art which were Hitchcock's alone. And to make this parade of Hitchcockian people even more interesting, each still photograph includes a quiz question for you to answer about the world of his films. You will find the answers on pages 95 and 96. If you don't wish to learn too much of the plot of a Hitchcock movie you may not yet have seen, simply skip that question.



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1. An early star for Hitchcock was Herbert Marshall, who in *Murder* plays a famous actor who, after serving on a jury which convicts a girl of murder, becomes convinced of her innocence and sets about to find the real killer. The film is remarkable in many ways, but is notable particularly in that Hitch here tackled something he would later rarely do. *What is it?*

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2. Leslie Banks, on the right, is being menaced by a threatening Peter Lorre in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*,. first filmed by Hitchcock in 1934. In the title role, Banks knows that a political assassination is being planned, but the villains believe him powerless to stop it *because of what reason?*

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3. Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll here look deceptively cheery in a scene from *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, a screen masterpiece Hitchcock fashioned from the John Buchan thriller. In his version The 39 Steps is a name for an organization of spies; in the new British adaptation, due to be released here this year, they mean a stairway going up to Big Ben. *What are they in the Buchan novel?*

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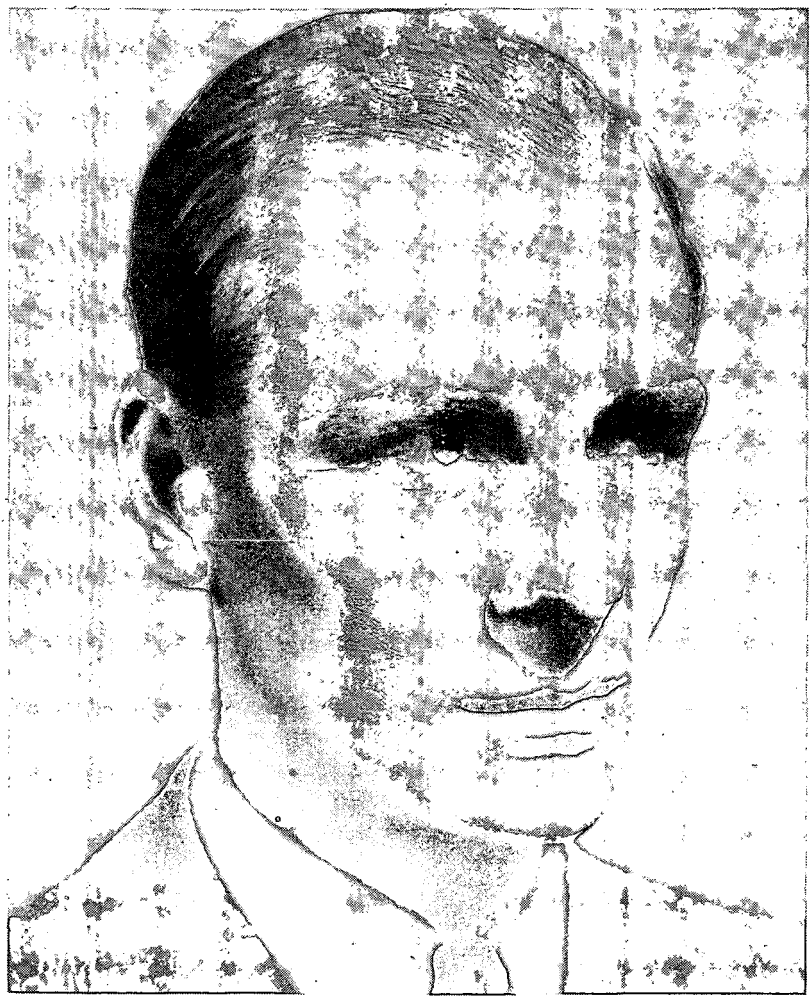

4. John Gielgud is the British spy Ashenden, drawn from Somerset Maugham's espionage stories, in *Secret Agent*. Hitchcock's approach to the dangerous work of spies is here unglamorous and Gielgud's agent is ordinary and unheroic. Indeed, only the villain is dashing and handsome. *Name him.*

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5. Sylvia Sidney here looks quite pensive. The film is *Sabotage*, from Joseph Conrad's novel, *The Secret Agent* (no relation to the Gielgud film on the previous page), and she is plotting revenge on her anarchist husband—Oscar Homolka—who has just inadvertently caused the death of her younger brother. *How does the boy die?*

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7. "Jolly good luck to them" are the parting words benign villain Paul Lukas utters at the climax to *The Lady Vanishes,* as the train containing the hero and heroine makes its escape to freedom. *Who and what is the title character who causes all the trouble—the lady who vanishes?*

6. An innocent-appearing children's birthday party is one of the scenes in *Young and Innocent.* Nova Pilbeam, right, is using the party as a cover to hide a young man accused of murdering his girl friend; she's sure he didn't. *Can you name the rather well known British mystery novel on which this film is based?*

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8. *Rebecca* was the first film Hitchcock directed in America, and an international success. In it a nameless heroine marries a brooding widower and is taken to his vast estate, Manderley, filled with ghostly reminders of his dead first wife, Rebecca. Here—at a costume ball—she is doing something quite unforgivable. *What is it?*

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9. Europe is on the brink of World War II, and a brash young American reporter on the trail of spies and assassins finds it all high adventure. In *Foreign Correspondent* an elder statesman has just been savagely murdered, and Joel McCrea (center, holding raincoat) has called the police to this Dutch windmill because he has noticed something decidedly amiss. *What has he spotted?*

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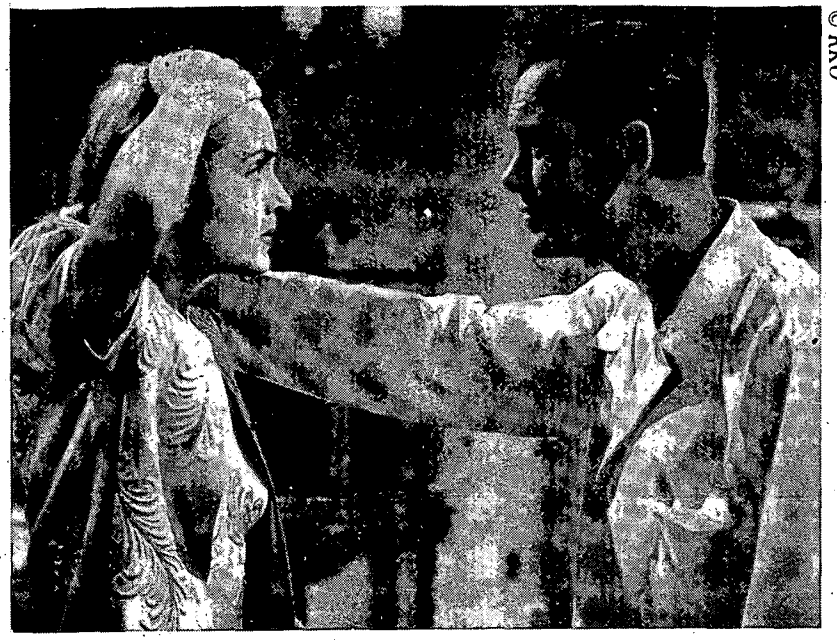

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11. Hitchcock had a fondness for showing his heroines wearing glasses. It is established the very first time we see the fragile Joan Fontaine of *Suspicion* that she needs glasses in order to read. Here she is reaching for our very favorite reading: the mystery shelf. *Why?*

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10. In 1941 Hitch embarked on his only attempt at comedy, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith.* Although light and frothy, it was not a success. Audiences wanted him to stick to murder. And as murder could not intrude in a comedy, *what is the ghastly problem facing this couple (Carole Lombard and Robert Montgomery)?*

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12. Both dog and fugitive are suspicious of a noise outside. The film is *Saboteur,* in which a handcuffed Robert Cummings—falsely accused of wartime sabotage—makes his way from this western cabin cross-country to New York City. *True or false: Is this the film where at the climax he hangs from the torch of the Statue of Liberty?*

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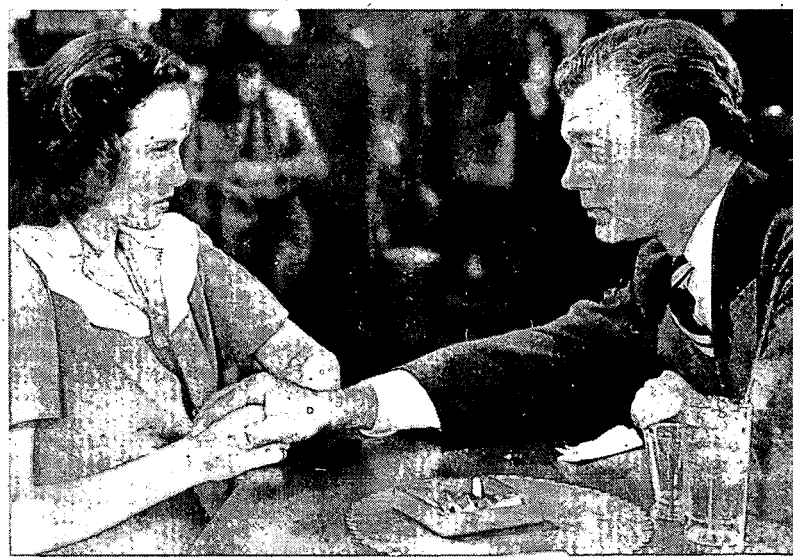

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13. Teresa Wright cringes from her beloved Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten); she has begun to suspect he is the notorious lonely-hearts killer the police are seeking. This is one of Hitchcock's personal favorite films. *Name both the tune associated with the film and the famous author who collaborated on the screenplay.*

15. The new doctor (Gregory Peck) at the private sanitarium exhibits some very strange behavior in the operating room. The eerie qualities of *Spellbound* are enhanced by the contributions of a distinguished artist and composer. *Name them both.*

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14. A bedraggled Tallulah Bankhead allows U-boat officer Walter Slezak to use her diamond bracelet as fish bait in a scene from *Lifeboat,* a film set entirely on a raft in the churning Atlantic. The Nazi has taken command of the motley crew of survivors aboard the lifeboat, dispirited because of lack of food and water. *What is the source of the Nazi's superiority?*

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16. Ingrid Bergman and Cary Grant are the lovers of *Notorious,* an elegant, sensual spy story. They are rummaging through the well stocked wine cellar of Claude Rains, and are not searching for the proper vintage. *For what are they looking—perhaps Hitchcock's most famous MacGuffin (that object, of no real use in the story itself, which nonetheless propels the plot)?*

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17. Gregory Peck in *The Paradine Case* is a British barrister determined to defend a beautiful, mysterious woman from the charge of murdering her blind husband. In the process, he falls in love with her—she is played by Alida Valli—even though he learns her husband's stable-groom had been her lover. *Can you name the dashing French actor who plays the groom?*

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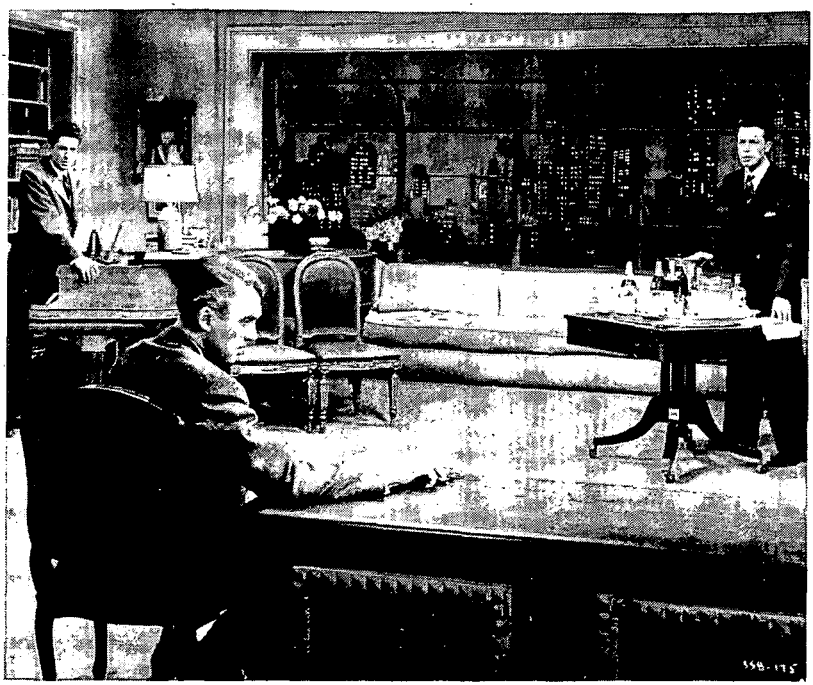
19. *Under Capricorn* was one of Hitchcock's rare costume films. Rarer yet, it was a non-mystery—although its central figures (Joseph Cotten, Ingrid Bergman, and Michael Wilding) were very troubled. *Where is the setting of this colonial drama?*



© Warner Brothers

18. The setting is a New York loft party, with sunset gradually darkening the skyline outside. James Stewart is a professor who gradually realizes his two young hosts, students of his, have just murdered a fellow student for the thrill of it. The film is *Rope,* from the play by Patrick Hamilton, who originally set it in England. Hamilton wrote another famed psychological thriller with a British setting. *Can you name it?*

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20. Musical star Marlene Dietrich here shares an uneasy confidence with her "dresser," Jane Wyman, who is actually a spunky young girl trying to get the goods on her for murder. The film, *Stage Fright,* is based on Selwyn Jepson's Eve Gill stories, in which our unorthodox heroine has an equally unorthodox reprobate father, who is among other things a gentleman smuggler. *Who plays him—in a felicitous example of perfect Hitchcock casting?*

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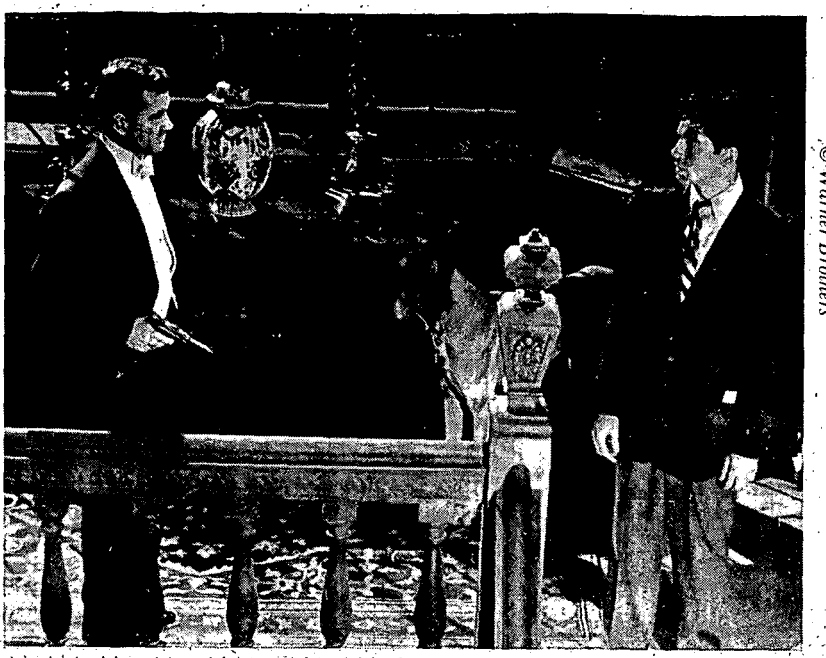

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21. In a very tense moment, two young men who have talked about exchanging murders confront one another. Robert Walker and Farley Granger were the stars of *Strangers on a Train*, taken from the Patricia Highsmith novel. Another very famous mystery writer, however, had a hand in the screenplay. *Can you name him?*

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23. A husband hires a seedy former classmate to murder his wife in *Dial M for Murder,* but the plan backfires: the wife (Grace Kelly) kills her assailant—but the police do not believe it is self-defense. Two questions: *What does the telephone have to do with the scheme? And what technical innovation did Hitchcock use in making this film?*

22. In *I Confess,* Montgomery Clift is a priest whose confessional vows prohibit him from revealing the identity of a murderer, and Karl Malden is the policeman who suspects the priest of the crime. This twisting drama does not unfold on the streets of San Francisco; *where* is *the location?*

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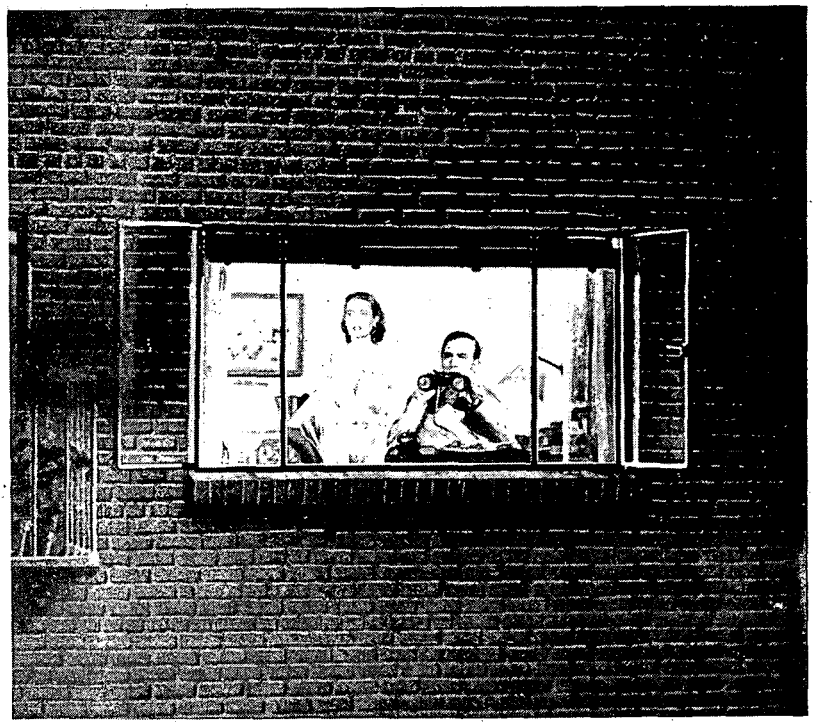
25. Cary Grant is a reformed cat burglar in *To Catch a Thief,* resorting to his former ways in order to trap another thief. Grace Kelly is, of course, the rich girl whose heart he steals, but *who plays her mother—who Hitchcock had stub out a cigarette in the yolk of an egg?*



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24. From his apartment window a news photographer with a broken leg (James Stewart) thinks he has witnessed a murder in the building across the court. *Rear Window* is taken from a William Irish story, and the killer is played by an actor who went on to even greater acclaim in our genre. *Name him.*

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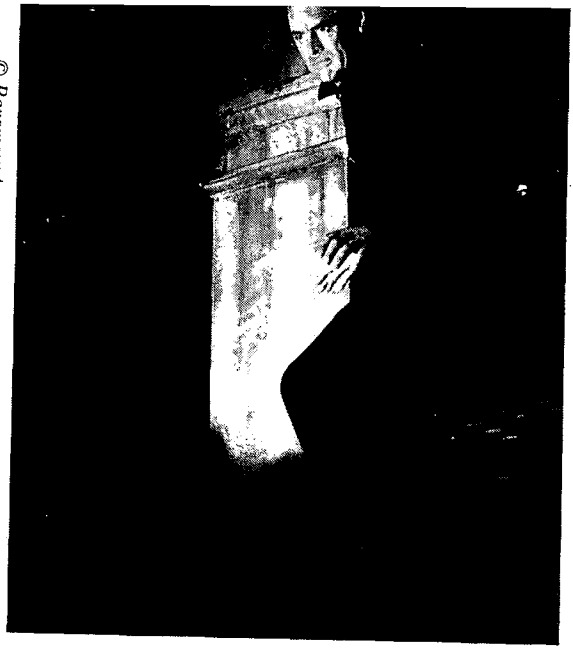

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26. In *The Trouble with Harry* Hitchcock said he "took melodrama out of the pitch-black night and brought it out into the sunshine." The Vermont sunshine, to be precise. Shirley MacLaine and John Forsythe are Vermonters involved in a light, macabre comedy, as here they view a corpse nestled in the greenery. *Just what is the trouble with Harry?*

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27. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* was the only film Hitch ever remade, and it was an elaborate remake. We all know about the climax at Albert Hall, where James Stewart and Doris Day must prevent an assassination. This is the beginning of the film, wherein a knifing at an Arab market reveals to two American tourists that the assassination will take place. *Who is the French actor who plays the agent who has just been killed?*

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28. *The Wrong Man* is Henry Fonda, a musician wrongly accused of a series of robberies actually committed by a look-alike. This true story was filmed by Hitch in documentary style. Here the man is with his wife (Vera Miles) discussing his seemingly hopeless case with a New York attorney, Frank O'Connor. *Who is the actor playing the real-life lawyer?*

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29. A detective whose fear of heights has prevented him from stopping the suicide of a friend's wife believes in *Vertigo* that the woman has returned from the dead. A bizarre and compelling film starring James Stewart and Kim Novak, *it was filmed in what American city—a city whose sense of history and the past added greatly to the mood of the story?* And perhaps you can answer this question as well: *What is the name of the suspense film based on another book written by the authors of the novel which suggested* Vertigo?

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30. Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint might well develop vertigo too in this climactic scene from *North by Northwest,* a delightful cross-country chase film, in which spies pursue Grant, thinking him an agent who in fact does not exist. *What was Hitchcock's first notion of a title for this film?*

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31. *Psycho* is surely the most famous suspense film ever made, and the book on which it was based, by Robert Bloch, is justifiably celebrated. *However, who wrote the screenplay—a man who then went on to help create an hour-long anthology television series devoted to the bizarre?*

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33. Tippi Hedren shrinks from Sean Connery; as *Marnie* she is a compulsive thief with whom a rich man falls in love—in an interesting and very complicated film. *Can you name the scenic stretch of American highway down which the two drive and talk during the film?*

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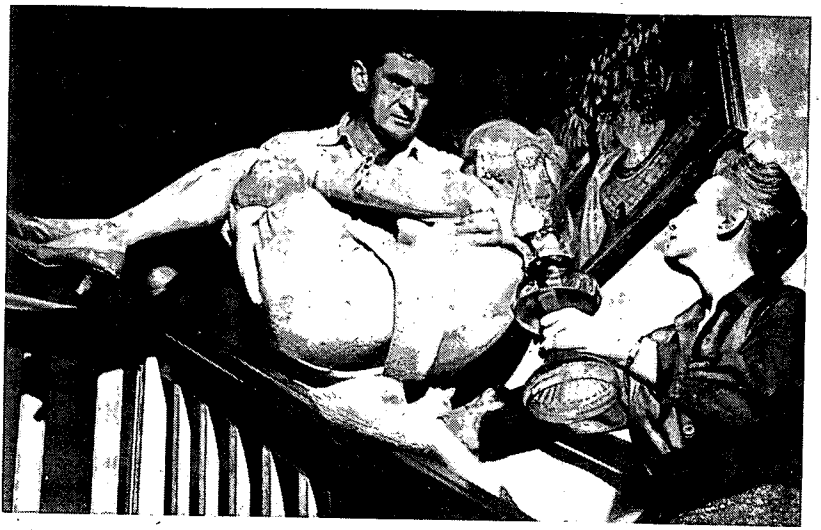

32. Rod Taylor carries Tippi Hedren down from the attic as Jessica Tandy looks on. The girl has just been savagely attacked by our feathered friends in *The Birds. Aside from Daphne du Maurier (who wrote the story on which the film was based), Evan Hunter (who wrote the screenplay), bird-trainers, and hundreds of birds large and small, what revered cinema craftsman contributed greatly to the look of this film?*

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35. *Topaz* is the code-name of a Communist spy group infiltrating the highest level of French security; here Dany Robin (right), as the wife of a French secret agent, and daughter Claude Jade wait anxiously outside a sports stadium as the husband—Frederick Stafford—confronts the man he believes leading the ring. *Before Topaz, with what had Stafford made a name for himself in European movies?*

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☜ 34. In *Torn Curtain*, a noted American physicist (played by Paul Newman) pretends to defect to East Germany in order to bring back out with him a secret formula. Julie Andrews tags along. In the film Newman must commit an act he finds quite repugnant. *What is it?*

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36. Critics called *Frenzy* Hitchcock's return to the top of his form. Here Jon Finch buys a newspaper, knowing that by some awful twist of fate the necktie strangler the police are seeking is *him. One of the delightful secondary characters in this film is Chief Inspector Hunt's wife (Vivien Merchant)—what is her specialty?*

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37. Barbara Harris and Bruce Dern are dazed as they walk away from an accident in *Family Plot:* their car has careened down a mountain road. (As well, they have become involved in a kidnapping scheme.) Considering their respective professions, both these two should have avoided this crash. *What* are *their professions?*

Bonus Question

38. At the start of each episode of his television show, Alfred Hitchcock stepped into a line-drawing of his profile which seemed to be composed mainly of half circles. *What creative artist drew the cheeky caricature that across the decades has become such a Hitchcock trademark?*

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ALFRED

Hitchcock PHOTOQUIZ

The Answers

1. The whodunit form. Hitchcock often said he preferred stories of suspense to filming whodunits.
2. They have kidnapped his daughter to insure his silence.
3. Steps leading up a deserted beach on a British seacoast.
4. Robert Young.
5. The boy is sent with a parcel carrying a bomb. He does not know the contents of the parcel, and when the bus he is riding is delayed the bomb blows up.
6. Josephine Tey's *A Shilling for Candles.*
7. Miss Froy, a kindly middle-aged governess (Dame May Whitty).
8. She is wearing Rebecca's dress.
9. The blades of the windmill have been turning in the wrong direction.
10. Because of a bureaucratic error, they are not legally married.
11. She suspects her ne'er-do-well husband (Cary Grant) is adding murder to his schemes.
12. False. The man dangling from Liberty's torch is the villain, Norman Lloyd, whom Cummings then tries to save.
13. The *Merry Widow Waltz.* Thornton Wilder.
14. He has a secret supply of water; the others discover this when they notice he is the only one who perspires.
15. Salvador Dalí (who designed the abstract dream sequence) and Miklos Rosza.
16. Samples of a uranium substance have been hidden in the wine bottles.
17. Louis Jourdan.
18. *Angel Street*—which was filmed as *Gaslight.*
19. Australia.
20. Alastair Sim.
21. Raymond Chandler.
22. Quebec City.

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23. The ringing of the phone is to bring Grace Kelly into the outer room, where the murderer is waiting to strangle her. It was shot in the 3-D process, though not released that way.
24. Raymond Burr—three years before *Perry Mason.*
25. Jessie Royce Landis.
26. That he is dead.
27. Daniel Gelin.
28. Anthony Quayle.
29. San Francisco. *Diabolique.*
30. As the climax took place on Mount Rushmore, Hitchcock toyed with calling it *The Man on Lincoln's Nose.*
31. Joseph Stefano, who wisely did not change much of Bloch's structure. He later was connected with *The Outer Limits.*
32. Ub Iwerks of the Disney Studio, who helped create Mickey Mouse and Flip the Frog, as well as the soaring flocks of *The Birds.*
33. The Pennsylvania Turnpike (they even stop at a Howard Johnson's).
34. He must help kill an enemy—and discovers it's very hard to do.
35. Stafford played a James Bond-type hero in a series of flamboyant spy films popular in Europe.
36. The preparing of ghastly, inedible "gourmet" dinners.
37. Bruce Dern is a taxi-driver and Barbara Harris is a psychic.
38. Alfred Hitchcock himself—of course.

If You Scored...

30-38: You're the fan who knew too much.
10-29: Dial M for More Hitchcock.
0-9: You're for the birds.

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Eloise thrived on the stresses of travel . . .

THAT LAST JOURNEY

by JACK RITCHIE

"Now be a good boy and don't pout," Eloise commanded. "Phone our travel agent and make arrangements for Kuala Lumpur."

Kuala Lumpur, hell, I thought. Enough is enough. However, I went to the phone and dialed our agent.

By now he recognized my voice. He was curious. "Kuala Lumpur? Why Kuala Lumpur?"

"Some sort of ethnic festival is taking place there next week and my

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wife wants to see it. Also, she's never been to the city before, which is challenge enough in itself."

When I hung up, I stalked upstairs to my stationary exercise bicycle. I am a firm believer in regular restrained exercise, though not necessarily out of doors.—

As I pedaled, I again went over my plan to dispose of Eloise.

Lord, how I hate traveling.

One is in a continual fret about plane reservations, train departures, and the comings and goings of buses and ferry boats. One spends miserable hours waiting in dismal foreign depots acquiring headaches if one dares to read under the always inadequate lighting.

One is forever the captive of anxiety. Where can one get one's money exchanged for the local currency? What are the official rates? How much better could one do on the black market? Is it worth the risk? Where will one eat today? What mysterious and usually nasty food will be served?

And there is the constant struggle to make oneself understood in illogical languages and impossible dialects. One must also worry about the water and one's laundry. When will it be done—if at all? Will it be returned or will it inexplicably disappear? And, perhaps worst of all, one is always aware that, as a tourist, one is fair game for anyone.

Yet Eloise thrives on these very stresses and has done so all her life. She regards them as adventure and she considers her spacious and quite comfortable American home as merely a place where one stops now and then to check up on the servants, collect the mail, and plan new travels. During the four years we have been married, we have averaged less than two months per year at home.

I am Eloise's fourth husband.

Her first was Abner, four years her junior. He died at the age of twenty-nine in Monaco when his sports car failed to negotiate a hairpin turn and crashed into a wine shop.

Eloise was eight years older than her second husband, Charles; forty to his thirty-two. Charles, a non-swimmer and a heavy drinker, met his death in Singapore. He apparently fell off the dark end of a pier during a yacht-club party.

Then Manfred. Eloise was fifty-two, Manfred forty. He died in the Carpathian Mountains. An avid collector of fungi, he was also a connois-

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seur of wild mushroom soup and had eaten it once too often.

During our courtship, I once rather delicately inquired of Eloise her viewpoint on age differences between spouses. She replied that years meant nothing to her, one was as young as one felt—with which I hastily concurred.

I had, of course, been fully aware of Eloise's penchant for gadding about the globe before I married her. However, in that spirit of optimism and reform in which one enters a new marriage, I had confidently felt that I could change her.

I had been wrong.

But travel so exhausts me mentally, emotionally, and physically that I finally came to the reluctant conclusion that something drastic had to be done. The situation simply could not be allowed to go on until I collapsed into an untimely death on some foreign field.

A divorce was out of the question. Initiating any such action on my part would probably result in my walking away penniless—something I quite dreaded.

No. There remained only one solution. Eloise had to take that last journey, and the sooner the better.

I had, at first, considered hiring a professional murderer while we were abroad. However, there remained the language difficulty. I couldn't picture myself seeking out a killer or discussing with him the fine points of murder in pidgin English.

I weighed seeking professional help here in the States. But where could I find it? One simply does not go about asking people if they know of a killer who is available. Even having found one, there still lurked in the background the later possibility of being blackmailed.

No, if one wants something done—even murder—one must do it oneself.

How would I dispose of Eloise? I would have preferred something basically non-violent—poisoning perhaps. However, poisoning immediately suggests an inside job, and I preferred to direct as much suspicion from my own person as possible.

No, I would have to arrange Eloise's death so that the blame pointed to that much-maligned individual, the intruder.

Should I smother her with a pillow?

I am in the best of health and reasonably strong, but I have a trick elbow. Suppose that during the smothering process it should suddenly

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slip out of joint again? It could prove most embarrassing and I doubted if I could smother Eloise with just one hand.

Shoot her? No. The police are frightfully clever about powder grains and that sort of thing. Even taking the precaution of wearing gloves might not prove sufficient. Besides, the report of the weapon would more than likely be heard by the servants and a time for the murder established, and I, for one, preferred to give the police as little help as possible.

No, Eloise must meet her death silently, and that suggested some kind of a cudgel—a blunt instrument, if you will—an instrument suggestive and characteristic of the intruder.

He would creep into Eloise's room, intent upon rifling her dressing table, when Eloise would awaken. She would be about to raise the alarm. Instead of just wisely fleeing, he would panic, grab the nearest weapon, and kill her. While all of this was happening I would be fast asleep in my own bedroom, of course.

Yes, my *own* bedroom. Frankly, I don't believe Eloise ever really wanted a fourth husband. She simply needed a traveling companion—one who would take care of the petty details and see to it that no trains, planes, or buses were missed.

I would murder Eloise tonight. There was no point in putting it off any longer. The arrangements for Kuala Lumpur might come through at any moment and the opportunity would be lost.

I went about implementing my decision by driving to the nearest shopping center, where I bought a pair of rubber gloves, a flashlight, and some batteries. In one of the shoe stores in the complex I purchased a pair of shoes three sizes too large for me, explaining to the totally disinterested clerk that they were a present for a friend.

That evening I retired to my bedroom at ten-thirty as usual, but now I remained awake. At one-thirty I fortified myself with one brandy. Two, I knew, would make me ill.

I slipped into the oversized shoes and tied the laces as tightly as I could. I put on the rubber gloves, pocketed the flashlight, and crept silently down the hall to Eloise's bedroom.

At her door, I listened. Yes, she was asleep. Eloise did not exactly snore, but she was certainly an emphatic breather.

I turned the knob and stepped into the room. There was just enough moonlight so that I could make my way about the room without having to switch on the flashlight.

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I removed the poker from its fireplace stand and returned to Eloise's bed. I sighed. The deed must be done firmly and without hesitation. I raised the poker and struck as hard as I could. Once. Twice. I then turned away from the bed and let the poker drop to the floor.

I now turned on the flashlight and went to Eloise's vanity table. I found her plush jewelry case and slipped it into my pocket. Next I scattered items about so that it appeared as though someone had been rifling the drawers.

I went to the French windows and opened one of them fully until it stuck in that position. I stepped out onto the balcony, proceeded down its length, and took the stairs to the rear terrace. I made my way to the gardener's shed, where I had previously ascertained that I would find a fifty-pound bag of fertilizer.

I shouldered the bag and walked down toward the flower gardens. As I neared them, I began running—or at least accelerated to a reasonable lope. I stepped into the soft soil of the tulip beds and when I reached sod again I stopped and lowered the bag.

Though I am in rather good condition, I was breathing heavily and it took some minutes before I recovered sufficiently enough to continue.

I used the flashlight sparingly to locate the marble fawn just beyond the flower beds. I opened Eloise's jewelry case and strewed its contents on the grass just beyond the fawn, then tossed the case after the jewelry.

Then I sharply rapped the head of the flashlight on a nearby stone bench until the lens and the bulb shattered and the flashlight went out. I left it lying there and carried the bag of fertilizer back to the gardener's shed.

When I returned to the house, I chucked the shoes and the rubber gloves in the basement incinerator. I went back upstairs to my bedroom, undressed, and eventually succeeded in going to sleep.

In the morning I was awakened by frantic knocking at my door. It was one of the maids. She had discovered Eloise's body.

I immediately phoned the police.

When they arrived—eventually in adequate numbers—they began questioning me and doing their best to reconstruct the crime.

After a while, a Lieutenant Randall joined me in the library to tell me what he thought had happened.

"We figure it was a burglar. He sneaked into the room and he was

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going through your wife's dressing table when she woke. He must have panicked and picked up the nearest thing—which happened to be the poker—and killed her."

I remained properly stunned.

"He grabbed your wife's jewelry case and ran down the terrace to the garden. We found his footprints in one of the flower beds down there. He was a man of about your height."

"Oh," I said. "Did someone see him?"

"No. We deduced that from his footprints when we measured the strides."

I nodded. "About my height and weight?"

"Your height, yes. Weight, no. We can tell that from the depth of the footprints. He was a pretty heavy man. Maybe even fat."

I remained impressed.

"We found jewelry and a jewelry case just beyond a marble fawn out there. We think that he was running, and that's something you shouldn't do at night on strange ground, even if you got a flashlight. He tripped over the fawn and the jewelry scattered all over the place. He didn't want to spend any time groping for it in the dark, so he just picked himself up and kept running."

"Groping in the dark? Didn't you say he had a flashlight?"

"It wasn't his lucky night. When he fell, the flashlight flew out of his hand and smashed itself on a stone bench."

Randall seemed rather pleased with himself. "We've collected all the jewelry we could find. Could you look it over and tell us if anything is missing?"

"I really wouldn't know. However, it doesn't make any difference. It was Eloise's traveling jewelry. All paste, or whatever they make imitations out of these days. She kept the originals in a safety-deposit box in her bank."

From his attitude, I gathered that Randall had never considered me a prime suspect, even from the beginning. Perhaps he didn't think me capable of brutal murder or violent action.

However, he was still curious about some things. "You and your wife had separate bedrooms?"

Perhaps I flushed a bit. "Yes."

"How long were you married?"

"Nearly four years."

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"How old was she?"

"Sixty-one."

Then came the inevitable question. "And how old are you, sir?"

I beamed proudly. "Seventy-four. But I take good care of myself. My father died at a hundred and one, my mother at ninety-eight."

Yes, I come from a long-lived family and I still have a good many years ahead, but not one day of them will be spent in Djibouti, Karachi, or Kuala Lumpur.

When the police left, I got into my slippers and found a comfortable chair beside the library fireplace. I opened a good book.

Ah, now *this* was the way to travel!

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Joe Candy was a little bit of con man, a little bit of thief . . .

THE SPLIT

by PERCY SPURLARK PARKER

Big Bull Benson felt like hitting someone. He wanted to put all his two hundred and seventy pounds into a punch and feel the impact ripple up his arm. He'd just got the word—Joe Candy was dead. Somebody had put a knife in him and dumped him in a vacant lot. A secretary for one of the big insurance firms downtown had found him this morning when she was out walking her dog.

Sam Devlin poured a slug of hundred-proof bourbon and slid it across

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the bar to him. "Damn shame," Sam said in his sandpaper voice. "I'm goin' ta miss that cat."

They were at the bar in the Bull Pen, the lounge and grill that took up most of the first floor of Bull's hotel. It was early, and there were only a couple other people down at the other end of the bar. He had wrestled the deed from the former owner in a poker game some time back. The highlight of the victory bash had been Joe and his wild antics. Joe could come up with the most outrageous lie or the funniest joke at the splash of bourbon over ice cubes. Joe even light-fingered half the wallets in the joint that night and stuck them back in the wrong pockets. That really caused a mess, but it was all for fun. That's the way Joe Candy was—a little bit of a con man, a little bit of a thief, but when it came right down to it, he wasn't such a bad dude after all.

Bull downed the bourbon without tasting it. The odds on Joe was that he was never going to make it to a big-time anything. He was most likely going to get himself killed or thrown in jail over some scheme too big for him to handle. The odds kept proving themselves correct. A reassuring fact for Bull Benson the gambler, but for Bull Benson the friend it was like a swift kick.

Sam offered the bottle again and Bull shook it off. There were times he'd welcome another drink or two, times it helped relax him, helped him think, but right now he was too keyed up. The deal couldn't have gone like the newscaster had said. Joe was found with his pockets turned inside out and the cops suspected robbery.

No way. Joe was mixed up with something that had gone sour and he got himself killed for it. That's the way it had gone down.

There was a frown on Sam's dark face, his bald dome picking up the glare of the neon from behind the bar. "Ya ain't thinkin' of nosin' inta this, is ya?"

"I might," Bull said, not really sure himself.

Sam looked at him for a long moment. "You've helped a bunch of folks outa some bad scenes, Bull. Me included. But it's like drawing ta a inside straight—it never gets any easier."

"I know, Sam. But it feels pretty good when you make it."

The closest Joe got to a steady was Vera North. They'd been an off-and-on number for years, taking turns in splitting up and patching their twosome back together again. Bull actually hadn't seen Joe in over a

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month, and he hadn't seen Joe and Vera together in twice as long. But if condolences were to be offered, he felt Vera was the one they should be offered to.

They lived in Newsom Garden. The city planners have a knack for giving public housing developments pleasant-sounding names, but the only thing this garden grew was concrete: concrete lawns, concrete playgrounds, concrete high-rises that scratched at the sky like huge, branchless trees.

Bull didn't recognize the dude who answered the door. He was tall and on the slim side. But the muscles showing from his short-sleeved shirt seemed firm. "Yeah?"

"Vera in?"

"Maybe, maybe not," the dude said, his black face scrunched in a frown. "You another cop?"

"Just tell her Bull Benson would like to see her, O.K.?"

The face straightened somewhat, the dude's muddled eyes seemed to focus on him, and a smile interrupted his stubbled beard. "Hey, yeah. Vera tol' me 'bout you. Come on in. Vera, come out here."

There wasn't much to the apartment—a kitchenette setup with a bedroom and bath off to the right. Vera came out of the bedroom draped in a yellow terrycloth robe. He had seen her on a number of different occasions—at parties, on her job, mopping the floor, shopping with Joe. Whether she'd just stepped from the beauty parlor or was slightly disheveled as she was now, he had always found her to be a very attractive woman.

She had a scarf wrapped around her head with patches of her thick afro protruding from several corners. She wore no makeup and her cheeks were a mite ashy, but the clear brown of her eyes had a warming effect on him. "Bull—good to see ya, babe."

She came over and gave him a big hug, reaching up and kissing him on the jaw.

"Sorry about Joe," he said.

She leaned back slightly. "These things happen, Bull. You know Joe—he'd been skimming by for a lot of years. It finally caught up with him."

There wasn't any harshness in her expression or tone, no sign of remorse. It threw him. Was she acting, or was it for real?

"Wipe the weird look off your face, Bull. I ain't cried over Joe for a

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long time. 'Sides, I got M.Z. now, and Joe was getting to be just a blur to me."

M.Z., still by the door, seemed to stand a little taller, his chest puffed up somewhat, his bearded chin stuck out. For a hot moment Bull felt like throwing him out the nearest window.

"I didn't know things had cooled so much 'tween you and Joe."

She went over to the table and got her cigarettes. "I've got something solid with M.Z., Bull. It was never that way with Joe. You should know that."

He didn't have to think long to come up with a reply. "I guess you're right, Vera. It's just that with all your fighting, I never thought you and Joe would really split."

"You thought wrong, Bull."

"Seems I did."

"Look, Benson," M.Z. said, coming toward him, "I work hard—nights at a warehouse. It's not the fast life Vera's been used to, but it's an honest life, and I love her more than any other man possibly could. Joe knew it and he never gave us any hassle about it."

Vera was standing next to M.Z. now, holding onto his arm. "He ain't lying, Bull. Once M.Z. and me got together Joe knew he couldn't come back in my life any more."

It sounded true. Joe had never been a terribly possessive dude. If Vera had found herself another love, Joe would laugh it off and bid her farewell. But knowing this didn't make Bull feel any better. Joe was still dead, and now there was one less mourner.

He started to go back to the Bull Pen, but since he was in this part of town, he swung by Sally's Sippin' Parlor. Whenever he'd wanted to catch up with Joe, the first spot he'd try was Sally's. It was a dive but ran clean, and the customers didn't have to worry about their booze being watered down too much.

Sally called to him when he stepped in. She was one of the skinniest people he knew—tall and bony, but as gentle a lady as they come.

"What's the word?" She smiled at him from across the bar.

"Same ol' same ol'," he said. "Joe crapped out for the last time."

The smile faded on her thin face and strands of her blonde wig bounced as she nodded. "Yeah. Rough scene. Hal and me were just rapping 'bout it."

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Hal Wicks sat at the bar, a near-empty mug of beer in front of him. Bull knew him. He was a punk, a hanger-on, an opportunist. Bull had always stayed clear of any dealings with him, mainly because he knew somewhere along the line Wicks was going to try to chisel and it just wasn't going to be worth pounding him into the ground.

"I'm gonna miss ol' Joe," Wicks said, showing a lot of bad teeth as he spoke.

"He was good people," Bull said, sitting one stool down from Wicks as Wicks turned up the last of his beer.

"Cops been by already," Sally said.

"Yeah? Who?"

"Mason and Dorant. In here a good hour at least."

They were a black and white team who owned this part of town. Bull had bumped into them before and everything had always been cool between them. "They share any ideas with you?" He knew it wasn't likely, but it happened sometimes.

Sally shrugged. "They were just full of questions."

"Like what?" he asked, digging a cigar out of his coat pocket.

"Usual stuff. Who had Joe been hanging around with lately? How had he been acting? Did he have any known enemies? Was there anyone he had it in for? You know—that kind of routine."

"What kind of answers did ya give 'em?" he asked, pulling lightly on the cigar.

"What was there to say, Bull? You knew Joe as well as anybody else. He was always up to something. This time it backfired on him."

Sally had used the same street math he had to come up with the answers on Joe. One hustler plus death equalled a fouled-up job.

"Joe'd been huddling pretty heavy with Claude Joyce," Wicks said. "I tipped the cops to that. Sally forgot. They were in here two or three times last week."

Sally shrugged again. "Hey, so I forgot. So what? I don't keep tabs on all the folks that come in here."

The day Sally didn't know what went on inside her Sippin' Parlor would be the day they started making round dice. She simply didn't want any part of the murder, and Bull couldn't blame her. Actually, he didn't have any business nosing around in it either, and he hadn't intended to. But, hell, here he was, asking questions, trying to put it all together. He had slipped into it so easy he hadn't realized it until now.

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"I don't know if the cops are gonna have much luck findin' Claude," Wicks said. "I ain't seen him myself in a day or two."

"Know what him and Joe were buzzing about last week?" Bull asked.

Wicks shook his head, frowning. "Got me, Bull. I didn't get that close to them. Just saw 'em rappin', that's all. Joe was in here yesterday morning looking for Claude though. I was gonna ask him what the whole deal was about, but by the time I followed him out he'd split."

He looked over to Sally. She didn't say anything at first, then: "I ain't got any idea either, Bull. If they were sittin' at the bar I might've picked up a word here or there, but they kept to themselves in one of the booths. Folks want privacy, I don't butt in."

He could've pushed it. People usually opened up to him more than they did to the cops. But if Sally knew any more about what Joe and Claude had had cooking, he didn't think she was going to be too free with the information, at least not in front of Wicks.

He could have made like a real bloodhound and tried to track down Claude, but he didn't think it would do any good. With Mason and Dorant on the case, if Claude could be found they'd find him first.

He spotted Forest Westerfield right off when he got back to the Bull Pen, sitting at the bar rapping with Sam, a burger and a diet soda in front of him. The after-work crowd hadn't started to gather yet, and the few people in the joint paid him no attention as he made his way to them.

"Bull," Wes nodded. The grey seemed to be creeping into his short afro more and more.

"What's the word on the street?"

"Thought you'd have it by now," Wes said, pushing his glasses back on his nose. Wes worked for the *Daily Challenger*, the paper that laid it on the line for the black population in the city. "Everybody's talking about Joe. It's big news for us when a hustler who's been in the game as long as Joe buys it. We're going to do a front-page spread in tomorrow's edition. Not like these white rags do." He gestured to a copy of the evening *Star-Times* on the stool next to him.

Wes was a firm believer in keeping an eye on the competition, and he never passed up the chance to compare the different styles. The *Star-Times* was featuring a story about some landmark that was being torn down to make room for a new office building. And they were doing an update on a yo-yo who was staying at the swanky Crest Hotel. Yesterday

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he had been dumb enough to carry fifty thousand dollars in cash around with him, in thousand-dollar bills no less, and even dumber to lose it.

"Mason and Dorant are handling the case," Wes said. "I'm going to get together with them later and tie up some loose ends."

"Have they caught up with Claude Joyce yet?"

An eyebrow raised over the rim of Wes's glasses. "I see you ain't been playing with your toes. Naw, they haven't tripped over him so far, but I don't expect it to take long. Who knows—we might be able to tag on 'case solved' to the story tomorrow."

"I always like happy endings," Sam said.

"If I could string the story out for a week we'd sell more papers," Wes said. "But I wouldn't mind if they wrapped it up today. I'd kind of like for the chump who offed Joe to get collared real fast."

Sam chewed on the toothpick in the corner of his mouth, nodding. "They don't use the chair 'nough. They need ta plug it in a few times. It'll make some of these punks think a little."

Wes shrugged. "Maybe you're right, Sam."

"Hell, I know I am." Sam turned to Bull. "How's Vera takin' it?"

He told them.

"Damn." Sam scratched at his head. "She got her somebody else, huh?"

"I knew that," Wes said. "I ran into her two, three weeks back, and she told me. You ever meet this M. Z. Brown before, Bull?"

"If I have I don't remember, Wes. Why?"

"Just wondering. He may be offering Vera the clean straight life now, but a couple years ago he was into the ponies pretty heavy. I used to see him all the time over at Fat Fred's book. I'm sure Joe knew him pretty well too."

That came from the bottom of the deck as smooth as any card Bull had seen played. He had more or less been setting his sights on Claude Joyce. He had eliminated any possibilities of bad vibes between M.Z. and Joe. But that was the natural combination. Maybe Joe wasn't going to take the split with Vera that easy. Or maybe M.Z. was the jealous type, and once he'd laid claim to Vera he wasn't going to allow anyone to take her from him. It was something to think about.

Mason and Dorant popped in on him about six. He was in his office trying to get some liquor invoices together and not doing such a great job because he was still preoccupied with Joe.

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Vic Dorant cut a straight path to the humidor on Bull's desk, plucked out a cigar, and fired it up. He blew the thick smoke high toward the ceiling. "Thanks."

"My pleasure," Bull said. "Aren't you dudes a little out of your district?"

Tommy Mason perched on the corner of the desk, leaning slightly forward. "You know we never pay much attention to precinct boundaries, Bull. Especially when we're working. Now we heard you been inquiring about your old buddy, Joe."

"Who says?"

"The street."

He started to lie, but there really wasn't any reason to play cat-and-mouse with them.

"I was curious," he admitted.

"We figured it was something like that," Dorant said around the cigar. "Just the natural concern of one friend for another." He was the bigger of the two cops, kind of squat-built, his pale-blond hair fading to grey.

Mason straightened some, his white teeth contrasting with his black, ashy face. "How do you read it, Bull?"

"I thought you dudes were gonna tell me."

Mason grinned. "Naw, that ain't the way it works, Bull. We ask the questions and you give us the answers."

"That's the way they taught us at the Academy," Dorant said. He was facing the left wall, looking at the photos that covered most of the dark paneling. They were all inscribed to Bull and the majority were of him and various sports figures. Dorant nodded at one of the photos. "Whatever happened to Lefty Tamlers?"

"He's doing O.K. for himself. Got a restaurant in Miami."

"See how easy that was for you, Bull?" Mason said. "Now how about my question?"

He wasn't trying to hold anything back. Hell, he didn't have anything to hold back. He hadn't even come close to forming any sort of solid idea. Basically he told them just that, throwing in his conversations with Vera and Sally.

Dorant was standing by the desk now, cigar smoke heavy in the air, and Bull knew he was puffing too hard to really enjoy the fine tobacco. "We thought your sources would pump the info to you better than that."

"I did too," he admitted.

Mason folded his arms across his thick chest. "What would you think

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if I told you M. Z. Brown was seen talking to Joe last week?"

"I guess I'd want to take a closer look at M.Z."

"Yeah. And if we say Hal Wicks was the one who told us?"

"Then I'd want to know how much it cost ya."

"He wanted a double sawbuck," Dorant said. "We slipped him five. He caught up with us a little while ago with the added information. I guess he got thirsty or something."

"If he thought there was a buck to be made," Bull said, "Wicks would tell ya he saw his momma talkin' to Joe last week."

Mason and Dorant agreed almost in unison.

"That kind of brings us back to Claude Joyce," Dorant said. "We know where he was up until four-thirty yesterday—cooling his heels down at central lockup for a trunk full of unpaid parking tickets. But he's not being too anxious about showing himself now."

"Don't look like your sources are doin' any better for you than mine are for me."

"We hit a dry spell sometimes," Dorant said.

"Been able to nail down the time of death?" Bull tried to ask it casually.

Mason shook his head. "There you go, asking questions again." He looked over to Dorant, Dorant offered up a little nod, and Mason turned back to Bull. "Doc's got it figured for sometime yesterday—late afternoon, early evening. Joyce stands a good chance of being our man."

"So you dropped by here to get a line on Joyce."

"Not really," Dorant said. "More like doing you a favor."

"Yeah," Mason cut in. "We thought we'd remind you this is a police investigation. And if you learn where Joyce is keeping himself, it'll be in your best interest to let us know. Fast."

"You do understand us, Bull?" Dorant asked.

"I get your drift," he told them.

"Fine," Dorant said, digging in the humidor again and stuffing a fistful of cigars into his breast pocket. "Then we can expect to hear from you soon."

After they left Bull pushed his invoices aside, got Grand-Dad from his desk drawer, and poured himself a stiff belt. He'd been threatened by cops before, maybe not as smooth as Mason and Dorant handled it, but threatened all the same. It had never in the past prevented him from doing what he'd planned to do, and it wasn't going to now. If he caught

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up with Joyce first and it turned out Joyce killed Joe, then Mason and Dorant were welcome to have what was left after Bull was finished with him.

He hit the phone pretty heavy then, calling in debts due. But nobody had seen Claude Joyce. A dude doesn't disappear like that unless he's hiding. He tried Sally again. After a bit she admitted Joyce had been by the Sippin' Parlor last night about six, looking for Joe. It was a little something she hadn't shared with him earlier nor told the cops about. The more he thought about it, the more facts he collected, it all seemed to tie to Joyce.

He was on a fantasy trip. He had Joyce pinned in a corner and he was hammering lefts and rights to Joyce's gut when Joyce came into his office.

"Bull," Joyce said, stepping up to his desk timidly. "How's it goin', man?"

Bull leaned back in his chair, trying to relax. His first impulse had been to start swinging. "Claude," he said finally. "Lots of folks been lookin' for ya."

"Yeah, I know, man. That's why I came ta see ya."

Bull motioned to the chair at the side of his desk and Joyce sat down. Fear has a way of taking over. It can take the usually calm and collected and dump them into a trick bag of jumbled nerves. Joyce was scared. He couldn't sit still in the chair—no great convulsions, just constant movement. He kept looking about the office as if he expected someone else to be there. He had missed at least a day's shave. A dark stubble coated his cheeks and his moustache looked a little ragged.

"I didn't kill him, Bull."

"Can you prove it, Claude?"

Joyce took a deep breath and glanced around the office, blinking. "No. But I didn't do it, man—honest."

Bull let it settle on him for a while. Either Joyce was telling the truth or he was trying to pull some kind of con. There was time to find out which. He got another glass out of the drawer and poured Joyce a drink.

"Thanks," Joyce said, spilling some of the bourbon before he got it to his mouth.

"Ya know the cops are looking for ya?"

Joyce nodded.

"That's why I came ta see ya. Ya can talk ta them for me, can't ya, Bull?"

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"I can talk, but they don't have to listen. What would I have to say anyway?"

"Ya know me, Bull. Joe an' me been tight for years—we wouldn't do nothin' ta hurt each other. You could tell 'em that."

"S'pose they want ta know why you an' Joe had your heads together so much last week?"

Joyce picked up his glass, set it down, and blinked twice before looking back at Bull. "Joe had this job workin'. We were suppose to turn a grand apiece for it. We had ta lift some white dude's wallet. I would be the stall and Joe was gonna do the dippin'. We planned it for yesterday about one. But I got busted for a bunch of parkin' tickets an' it took me till after four ta get outa the slammer. I tried ta find Joe but nobody'd seen him. Then this mornin' I found out he was dead. Knowin' the way the cops think, I knew they'd come lookin' for me, so I hid out."

"Know who the mark was, or who was payin' Joe for the job?"

"Joe wouldn't tell me. We were jus' suppose ta meet yesterday mornin' at ten at the Crest Hotel ta case the joint for the score. I was on my way there when I got picked up for those damn tickets."

Bull still couldn't tell about Joyce. The story sounded on the up and up, but then Joyce had had all day to come up with it. There was something he could check out though—a little something that clicked at the back of his mind as Joyce was talking.

He went into the lounge, found the copy of the *Star-Times* Wes had had with him, and brought it back to his office. He skimmed the story a couple of times before he found it. The dude who'd lost the fifty thousand dollars yesterday was staying at the Crest Hotel. It didn't take a mathematician to add that up. "Well?" Joyce was still seated, fright hanging onto his every twitch. "Are ya gonna help me, Bull?"

"We'll see, Claude," Bull said. "We'll see."

Ira Holstein had a suite of rooms on the thirty-second floor of the Crest Hotel. He was still in town waiting for the boys in blue to find his missing money, and he consented to meet with Bull after Bull phoned and told him he might be able to locate it.

The papers hadn't carried any pictures of Holstein, but Bull knew it wasn't Holstein who answered the door. The dude who performed that service had spent some time in the ring. He had an inch or two on Bull and maybe about fifty pounds. His eyebrows sat on thick, lumpy scar

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tissue, and years ago somebody had tried to push his nose around to the back of his head. "You Benson?"

Bull nodded.

The dude sized him with his eyes. From the way his jacket fitted him he was carrying an arsenal. "O.K., come in."

Holstein was waiting for him by a mirror-backed bar. He set his martini down but didn't extend his hand. "You have my money?"

"I never said I did, Mr. Holstein."

"I can call the police, you know. Or maybe George here can convince you to tell the truth."

Bull stepped back as the muscle came in on him. Once out of the ring, the dude should have had smarts enough to find himself a safer occupation. He led with a dumb, slow right that Bull easily sidestepped, hooking in a right of his own and following through with a left cross.

Holstein was practically climbing on top of the bar. "Stay away from me! Stay away from me!"

"Relax, will ya, Mr. Holstein?" Bull hadn't come here to fight but, forced into it, it felt pretty good. He'd been wanting to hit somebody all day. "I don't have your money, Mr. Holstein, but if ya can answer a few questions for me I may be able to get it for ya."

"Questions?" Holstein said. He was still hugging the bar.

"That's all, Mr. Holstein. Or do I have to play basketball with Georgie again?"

"No, that won't be necessary. Ask your questions."

George was trying to get up, but he wasn't making such a swell job of it.

Bull fired up a cigar, positioning himself so he could keep Holstein and his muscle in plain view. He didn't want any surprises. "The papers say you're some kind of art dealer."

"Art broker is a better description. I travel all over buying art objects for my clients."

"You always carry that much cash around with you?"

"Sometimes more," Holstein said. He was working on his martini again. "I find at times that cold cash is the weighing factor to whether I get the nod from a seller or not. And I usually have George or someone else in my employ with me at all times."

"Was he with you yesterday?"

"Yes—for all the good it did."

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Bull let the newspaper story run over in his mind again. Holstein had gotten the money from the hotel safe in the manager's office and gone directly to the Petersen Gallery for a private showing. It wasn't until about an hour later, when he was about to make a purchase, that he noticed the money was missing. "How many people knew you'd be in town?"

"Half a dozen or so. But the police have been over this with me. I lost the money somewhere between here and the gallery—in the cab or probably on the street."

"How about the hotel lobby?"

"What?"

"When you were leaving for the gallery, did ya bump into two black dudes somewhere in the lobby?"

"No," Holstein said. Then it sunk in like someone had trained a spotlight on him. "Wait a minute! Just as I was about to leave by the revolving door there were two men coming in! You mean my pocket was picked? I didn't feel a thing!"

"With Joe ya wouldn't have," Bull said, more to himself than anyone else. He got his wallet out and flipped to the photo of the Bull Pen's softball team. They'd come within one game of winning the Liquor League title last year. Joe had been handling the pitching chores. "Recognize anybody on this?"

Holstein took his time, studying and frowning, then said, "The one on the end, without a cap. I think he was one of them."

Bull had known it all along. The odds were running that way and Holstein had put the clincher to it. The next step was to find out who'd been the dude with Joe, and the probable murderer.

M.Z. and Joyce were his best bets, but Joyce had been in the slammer at the time the wallet was lifted. It left the finger pointing at M.Z. all by himself. But Bull had played hunch bets before. And every gambler knows long shots have a habit of paying off.

Things were pretty quiet at the Sippin' Parlor—customerwise, that is. The juke box was testing everybody's eardrums with something loud and fast featuring a lot of drums. Sally was at her usual post behind the bar, and Wicks was sitting on a corner stool, cheating at solitaire.

"You're not suppose to peek."

Wicks grinned up at him. "How else am I gonna win?"

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"Hell, with all the dough ya got now ya shouldn't have ta worry about losin'."

"What's that s'pose ta mean?" Wicks said it lightly but his eyes were jumping, scanning the joint, probably looking for Mason and Dorant tucked in a corner somewhere.

"Get you a drink?" Sally asked, coming up to them.

"No, thanks," Bull said. "But I'll take the use of your back room for a few minutes, if ya don't mind."

The expression on his face must have been as easy to read as a billboard. "Sure," Sally said. "Just don't wreck the joint, O.K.?"

He gave a nod and Wicks marched into the back without a word until they were inside with the door closed.

"What the hell is all this about, Bull?" Wicks was looking wild, his eyes wide and bloodshot, sweat beading his face.

"Let's not play any games. You know what's goin' down."

"Hell, you're the one playing games, Bull."

"Am I? Well, let's make it truth or consequences. Joe had this big score lined up and, when he couldn't find Claude Joyce, he pulled you in with him. Or you forced yourself on him. Ya said ya followed him out of here yesterday. I'll give odds that if the cops really canvass the area they'll find somebody who saw you two go off together."

"So what would that prove?"

"That ya lied, like ya lied about seeing Joe and M.Z. together. I figured ya found out somehow Joyce was in the slammer when the deal went down. Ya knew the cops would get hip to it so ya threw them M.Z. to cover your tail."

"Man, you're really going off," Wicks said, rubbing his bony hands together and shifting from one foot to the other.

"Naw, you're the one that's off, for pullin' such a dumb play. Ya got a look at how much dough was in that wallet and ya couldn't stand to let it go. In some ways Joe was no better than you are. But with him, if he made a deal he'd stick with it. Tell me—just what the hell can ya do with fifty thousand dollars in thousand-dollar bills?"

It wasn't the smoothest move Bull'd ever seen, but it was smooth enough. A little tap at his waist and the knife was in Wicks's hand. "Damn you, Bull. Damn you!"

It was a good eight-inch blade, but Wicks's hand was trembling like it was a hundred-pound barbell.

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"One dumb play after the other," Bull said. "I bet that's the same knife ya used ta kill Joe."

Wicks froze for a moment, glancing down at the knife, and it was enough to tell Bull he was right about that too.

"All right, Bull," Wicks said, almost in a sigh. "It went pretty close to the way you said it, man. I didn't mean to kill him—but he wouldn't listen. He had all that money. Fifty big ones. And he wanted to turn it over to some white dude at an art gallery. It didn't make any sense. I tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn't go for it. But, hey, we can split it, Bull. Twenty-five grand apiece ain't bad."

"Sounds choice. Except ya forgot one thing. Joe was my friend."

Wicks had almost seemed to perk up for an instant and then his face went cold, his eyes narrowing, his shoulders hunching. "Then go join your friend," he said, and lunged forward.

He made two swipes with the knife, coming close but not close enough. Bull cupped Wicks's elbow on his second pass, swinging him completely around and coming in with an overhand right. It landed dead center on Wicks's nose, knocking him back into a stack of beer cases. The noise was equal to the racket the jukebox was making.

The cops found the money under the refrigerator in Wicks's apartment. Pressure was put to the gallery staff until a senior salesman admitted having planned the original deal. Mason and Dorant didn't thank Bull Benson, and it was fine with him. He hadn't done it for them anyway.

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He owed his lawyer a sheik's ransom . . .

Opportunity. When you see it, recognize it. When you recognize it, grab it. That's the way I've always operated, and I've managed to stay ahead of inflation.

The trick is in recognizing opportunity when it knocks—instantly—so you can welcome it in and exploit it before it moves on. He who hesitates deserves to be lost. And I recognized a fine and timely opportunity the night I lost my way driving back from Lake City and was winding through

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the hills outside of town, trying to get back to the highway. As I was coaxing my Buick up a desolate road, it suddenly occurred to me that I was in familiar territory. Then, near a crossroad, I saw the sign—PLEASANT LAKE ESTATES—with an arrow pointing off to the left toward a wide pattern of lights below.

Harry Carver and I had once contemplated pulling a job in Pleasant Lake Estates. It must have been almost a year ago. We'd had a big suburban house cased—a middle-aged couple without children, no dog or burglar alarm. The husband was a wealthy car dealer we figured to keep a lot of valuables in the house. But Harry had been picked up on a job and was now a guest of the state, so the deal had been forgotten. Until now. Opportunity.

My checking account was running low, and I owed a woman in St. Louis and my lawyer a sheik's ransom. This kind of job, especially if there was plenty of jewelry or silver, must have been sent my way by providence, which recognizes that everyone has to buy groceries.

The moon, dodging clouds, was free at the moment, and I noticed the small grove of trees where we'd parked Harry's car and sat talking over the job.

I checked my rearview mirror. No headlights. Killing my own car's lights, I braked and eased off the road toward the trees. The left front wheel hit a deep rut, then the ground smoothed out nicely and I stopped in the shadow of the trees out of sight from the road.

The night was warm, with only a faint breeze that carried the scent of blossoms. I rolled down the window all the way and sat looking down the slope at the Pleasant Lake Estates.

There was the house, exactly as in my memory. It was one of those spread-out ranch houses designed to hug the ground. I saw again the things Harry and I had liked: the seclusion of the house on its acre lot on the edge of the ritzy subdivision, plenty of shrubbery around the windows to conceal entry and exit, no outside lighting, no fences to hinder fast escape. With very little effort I remembered the floor plan we'd obtained from the real-estate salesman. This was the Executive Five model, with a swimming pool. I stared at the window I knew led into the utility room, the window we'd decided was the best point of entry.

The tools I used were in the toolbox in the trunk of the car—ordinary tools that didn't constitute a burglar's kit. No real pro in my profession carries around lock picks and all that paraphernalia that can be used

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against you in court if you're collared. A simple claw hammer, screwdriver, masking tape, and glass cutter, all mixed in with carpenter's level, wrenches, nails, glue, and whatever an ordinary handyman's toolbox would contain, aren't that incriminating if found in your car.

The clouds blotted out the moon again, making it conveniently dark. All around me the crickets were screaming for me to do it.

I fixed the dome light so it wouldn't come on when I opened the car door, then got out. Within a few seconds I had what I needed from the trunk. I got out the dark-blue windbreaker I keep in the car and put it on over my light shirt. My slacks were dark and would cause no problem, blending nicely with the night. I had a good feeling as I walked down the slope toward the strip of woods between me and the house, the familiar excitement. I never was in this game only for the money. Do it, do it, do it, the crickets kept insisting.

At the edge of the woods near the house, I waited until it was almost completely dark. The clouds cooperated with me, cohorts in my destiny. In deep shadow, I crossed the long stretch of flat ground, the narrow dry creek, and the yard, and crouched in the shelter of the shrubbery outside the utility-room window. With a bar of soap to quiet the glass cutter, I traced a six-inch square on the bottom of the window, taped the top cut, then tapped the glass so that the square opened almost noiselessly like a flap, allowing me access to the window lock. I'd seen the display models and knew exactly where and what kind the lock was. It was simple to reach in, unlock the window, and raise it silently in its aluminum frame. I climbed inside, darting the weak beam of my taped flashlight around to get my bearings, and stood listening.

A refrigerator hummed softly. Beyond that, what sounded like an air conditioner gave a gurgling sigh as its thermostat kicked it on. Other than those sounds, silence.

I opened the door to the kitchen and made my way through to the den and down the hall to the main bedroom.

A man and a woman were sleeping in the bedroom. That was how I liked them, home and sleeping. That's how any real pro likes his victims. That way he knows exactly where they are—they can't come home unexpectedly and surprise him, or notice some little thing wrong from outside the house and phone the police from a neighbor's. And it was the perfect hour: 3:00 A.M. People are deepest into sleep at three in the morning.

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I looked at the two of them. The woman's blonde hair was splayed over the pillow, and one of her pale legs was extended from the covers. If I wanted, I could have the woman. If I wanted. This man was rich and important, but right now I could have anything he owned. I would take what pleased me. He would have no idea of the power I wielded over him until after I was gone.

But of course I didn't want the woman. I was a professional. It was the power that interested me. And I had to make a living.

As I silently rummaged through the dresser drawers, I listened to the deep, rhythmic breathing of my sleeping victims. While I worked I would monitor that breathing, and if either of them began to awaken I would know it before they did and would be gone before they suspected my presence.

I pocketed a nice gold pendant, an expensive watch, and some diamond earrings before I'd even located the woman's jewelry box. There was a nice portable TV at the foot of the bed that I could take too, if I found nothing more valuable to burden my exit.

Thunder rolled softly outside, and large drops of rain spattered against the windowpanes. The woman stirred and drew her leg back beneath the covers. I waited until her breathing had evened out before continuing my search of the dresser. In the next drawer I found the teak jewelry box. When I opened it, lightning flashed and its contents glittered. The real stuff. Somehow I would have to thank Harry Carver when he got out. I wouldn't cut him in or tell him about the job, but maybe I'd buy him a drink.

Thunder sounded again, nearer this time, and louder. I began stuffing the jewelry into my pockets.

That's when, literally, lightning struck. It hit something nearby, maybe even the house, and the deafening report of thunder was almost instantaneous.

The woman was screaming even before the rumbling stopped. I saw her in the dresser mirror, hair wild, eyes wild, mouth wide. I went for the window, my heart banging like a trapped thing. The screaming was making the hair on the nape of my neck stand up. God, wouldn't she ever have to breathe?

As I was raising the window a hand grabbed my arm. I turned, expecting the man, but it was the woman. Her eyes were glinting in the moonlight, her mouth contorted in fury. She began to claw at me, beat on me with

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her fists. Beyond her shoulder I saw her husband, an ominous figure in striped pajamas, sitting up in the bed.

"Stop!" she was screaming. "Stop! Stop!" As if I was beating on *her*.

I shoved her away and she came back like she was on a string, her fists flailing. Without thinking, I reached to my belt and withdrew the hammer. I struck out with it, felt it hit something—not hard—and the woman backed away, holding the side of her head. I lowered my own head and jumped through the window in a glittering spray of glass, running when I hit the wet grass, almost falling, then picking up speed.

Behind me there was a loud roar, and something like angry hornets in formation hit my right shoulder, almost knocking me down. I kept running, heading for the cover of the woods. There was another roar, which I recognized as the report of a large-gauge shotgun, but this time it missed me. I stumbled across the narrow creek, now running with a shallow swift stream that sloshed coldly into my shoes. Then I was across, in welcome darkness, and I entered the woods.

My breath sounded like a file rasping over steel as I lurched forward, gripping my shoulder. Branches scratched my face, like the woman's grasping, long-nailed fingers. Then a large limb smashed me in the chest. I clutched at the rough bark and dropped dizzily to the ground.

Within a few minutes I had my breath back, and I needed it like I never had before. It was no longer raining. Sirens were wailing like mournful wolves, and through the trees I could see red lights flashing in the direction of the house.

As I stood up, my shoulder reminded me that I'd been struck by shotgun pellets. I explored with hesitant fingers and was relieved to find I wasn't bleeding badly. My right arm was weak, but I would be able to drive. My one chance was to cross the open stretch of land on the other side of the woods and reach my car.

I heard voices now, movement among the trees. They were searching for me.

Bent low with pain and caution, I began to move.

Then from overhead came a loud, fluttering beat like a heart gone wild. A helicopter! They had a helicopter after me! Using my arms to slash the branches out of my path, I ran.

The woods to my right were suddenly starkly white under the helicopter's searchlight. The craft swooped lower, its rotor hammering the

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air. The trees provided some cover from the searchlight, but I'd need a lifetime's worth of luck to cross the open ground.

Finally I made the edge of the woods and crouched low, gathering my nerve to dash to the grove of trees that concealed the car. Behind me was the distant sound of shouting and I caught an occasional glimpse of flashlight beams through the trees. I decided to go.

I was up and running, on open ground now, feeling naked and vulnerable. I lifted my knees high, trying to gain speed and traction on the slippery grass. At any moment I could expect—what? A bullet in the back? A blast of air, light, and noise from the helicopter? A figure looming ahead of me behind the flash of a muzzle blast?

But I made it to the car.

I draped myself over the still-warm hood, clinging to it as a child clings to the protection of its mother. I tried not to gasp too loudly while I regained my strength. The crickets now seemed to be sounding a frantic alarm.

My chest heaving, I climbed into the car and reached for the ignition key. For the first time it struck me as funny that I always put my trust in people's honesty by leaving the key in my car when I went on a job. But it had paid off. If I'd had it with me, it might have fallen out of my pocket as I fought my way back to where I'd parked.

My fingers had barely closed about the key when a voice close to the left made me draw back my hand and sit still in terror.

"You get the same chance she did, scum!" the voice said. It was a quiet but quavering voice.

I looked up to see the man in the striped pajamas aiming the shotgun through the window. His dark hair was plastered raggedly to his forehead and his eyes held the stare of a man whose thoughts were deadly and his own.

In an instant I realized he had outfoxed the police. Being familiar with the territory, he'd guessed where I'd left the car and had come directly here and waited.

There was a taste in my mouth like I had a copper penny under my tongue. "Wait!" I pleaded. "Please!"

He moved the shotgun closer.

That's when the lights flashed on and the beat of the helicopter was suddenly deafening. The man with the shotgun squinted against the abrupt glare. In the haze of brilliant light, I saw figures approaching the

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car. "There's no need for that, sir!" someone shouted at the man above the din of the copter.

I sat motionless, my eyes fixed on the dark shotgun barrel. I was stunned, numbed by the noise, the glare, and the fear.

Shadowy figures came up gently behind the man in pajamas and slowly the shotgun barrel withdrew, disappeared. Then the door opened and I felt hands on me. Pain jolted through my wounded right shoulder.

"I'm hurt!" I moaned as they yanked me from the car. Someone shoved me against the side of the car and raised my arms roughly so that I was leaning forward at an awkward angle, my weight supported by my hands against the car roof. I was frisked expertly and none too gently. "I'm hurt!" I told them again.

"That's a damn shame," somebody said.

I'd been collared before, but without all this rough play. "It's only breaking and entry!" I protested. "Why so rough?"

For a few minutes there was only loud breathing as my captors examined the jewelry they'd found in my jacket pockets. Then I heard the words, "You're under arrest for murder." A cop with a flat voice began reading me my rights.

"*Murder?*" I was astounded. I remembered hitting the woman with the hammer, but it hadn't been that hard a blow, and she'd been standing up when I fled. I was positive of that!

"There wasn't any reason to kill her," one of the cops said. "You must have hit her at least a dozen times."

My own words stuck silently in my throat, gagging me. I'd hit her once! I *knew* I'd hit her only once!

Then, in the bright white light tinted with flickering red, I saw the husband very faintly and for just an instant smile at me. I knew that smile; I'd seen it a thousand times in the mirror.

It was the smile of a man who recognized opportunity when it knocked.

The January 7 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale December 16.

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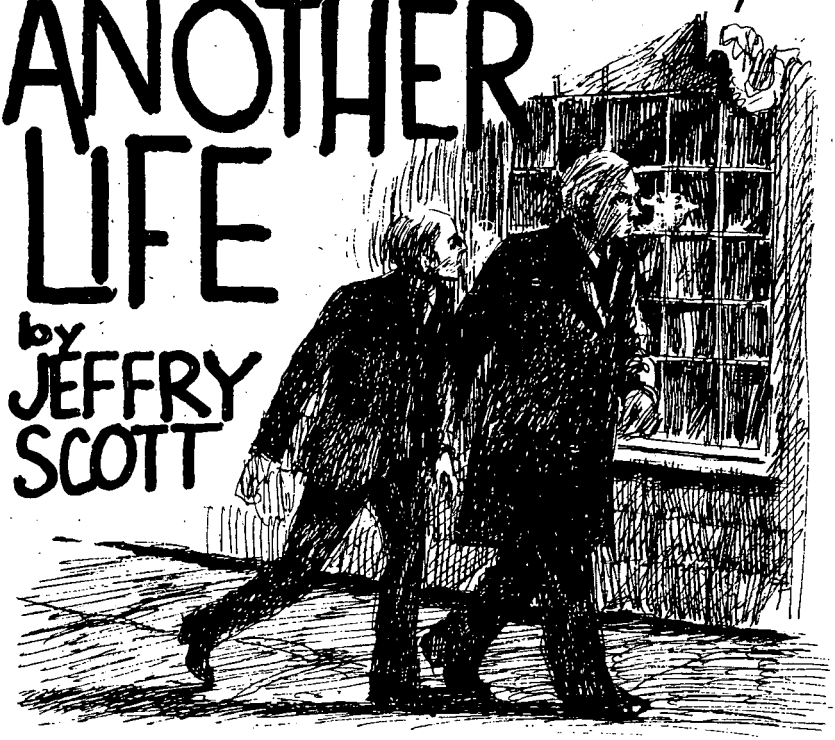
Smudger had been a nasty little sneak in prison and nothing had changed . . .

ANOTHER LIFE

by JEFFRY SCOTT



"Don't you 'My dear man' me," little Marks snarled. It was a breathless, gulping protest, because he was jogtrotting to stay at his former cellmate's elbow. But he had enough air to snigger at a sudden thought. "You're right, mind—I *am* dear. Bloody expensive, if you don't watch your mouth."

Ezral had just tried to snub him by saying, "My dear man, there's nothing to talk over, as you put it. You were a nasty little sneak in prison,

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and nothing's changed. Except that I'm free again, and can now choose my company."

Great overgrown schoolboy, Marks thought with contempt. Sneak, indeed! Said with a plum in the mouth. That would cost Mr. Lord Almighty Ezral an extra fiver a week—though he didn't know it yet.

Their shadows danced wildly, shrinking, elongating, shrinking, jumping into life under bars of dismal orange street-lighting, vanishing in intervals of shadow or smog. Ezral looked quite surprised to find Marks still at his side when they reached the next intersection.

"You hadn't ought to be so toffee-nosed, old cock," said Marks. His breath made smoke signals in the autumn chill. "Life's hard for ex-cons. You've found that out, I'm sure. Having an enemy can be a right little disaster."

Ezral halted abruptly, squinting down as if only just bothering to get Marks into focus. "Blackmail?"

"That's it." Harry Ezral was a hypocrite. He knew the score—otherwise he wouldn't have skipped and started life anew several hundred miles from his old home. His cheap but neat suit, dark topcoat, and well polished shoes announced painstaking respectability and a steady job. But nothing was steady for a man with a record—which was why Smudger Marks made a point of looking up acquaintances from his frequent spells inside: the first-timers, terribly shaken and cravenly determined to stay free, hiding, never forgetting their past. Men like Harry Ezral, who'd been a company director until a drunken spree had ended in primitive rage, a conviction for manslaughter, and five years in prison.

Marks sighed impatiently. "Come on, Sunshine—we been through this before. Suppose I told your boss what you're like when you get drunk? What you did? Eh?"

Ezral moved on, but the stride had become a plod and he looked older, large yet somehow shrunken. "He knows."

"Maybe," Marks countered disbelievingly. "But what about the neighbors? Your old woman's a bit sensitive. If I started drinking in your area, chatting round the shops . . . No need to make things harder for her."

Harry Ezral stopped again, his gaze genuinely wondering. "My God, you're a poisonous specimen."

"Sticks and stones. Fifteen quid a week and I'm silent as the grave. A bargain offer what with inflation and all that."

They walked in silence. Marks blessed his luck. He'd written off the

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Ezrals as a source of income. Nettie Ezral, that pink-eyed white mouse of a woman, had sent the cash faithfully, but then he had fallen for an eighteen-month sentence and had come out to find the Ezrals' house long since sold. Mrs. Ezral had moved there when her husband was sentenced. She hadn't mixed with her neighbors, for obvious reasons, and nobody knew what had happened to them. It was a decaying suburb full of people on their way down, up, or through; nobody really wanted to know where they'd gone.

Yes, he'd said a sad farewell to the Ezrals' sixty pounds a month tax free. Until tonight when, stuck on a railroad station at the back of beyond, with two hours to wait before the next London train . . .

He chuckled and rubbed his hands, a ferrety gnome scurrying along beside the toppling giant that was Harry Ezral. Smudger Marks had glanced through the steamy window of the station bar and there was Ezral two platforms away, getting off a local train and hurrying toward the exit.

Marks congratulated himself that he'd been living right—plainly a lie. Meanwhile, he hadn't the faintest idea where they were going. Until getting off the train to change to the London Express after a horse-race it had been a costly mistake to attend in the first place, he had only known this town as a name on the map.

He wasn't scared. Harry Ezral had lost his head once and thrown a boozy punch at a man with an abnormally thin skull. He wasn't a villain, far less a murderer. Just a loser.

Marks dug Ezral in the ribs and jerked his narrow head at a pub. "Better have a drink and a chin-wag." It was an order, not a suggestion.

"I don't drink since—I don't drink any more. We're almost there." Ezral spoke absently. "How did you find me—er—Smudger?"

"Mr. Marks to you. Never mind how, just remember I can *always* find *you*," the little man bluffed, then collided with Ezral as he stopped without warning and fumbled for keys. They were at the start of a defeated parade of small shops set back from the main street.

Leading the way, Harry Ezral went down a service alley behind the shops. "Better go in the back way," he said, more to himself than his companion. "If people see a light in the shop they start pestering you to open again."

"Suits me." Marks nudged Ezral again. "That's what you meant by the boss knowing! *You're* the boss, eh?"

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Very nice; Ezral must be worth thirty pounds a week now.

Darkness, pervasive cold, then the nagging brilliance of a naked bulb. Blinking, Marks watched Harry Ezral shut and carefully lock the door. They were in a room that hadn't altered much in half a century: linoleum floor, brown paint, an antiquated safe, and a roll-top desk.

"Cozy," said Marks.

"I make a living. There's a supermarket due to open next year. That'll probably take my trade, but the site might be worth something for redevelopment." Ezral sat down heavily, knees apart, breathing with his mouth open. He looked lumpish and dazed.

Smudger Marks shivered and took the only other chair, a bentwood affair that shook under him. A calendar bearing the name and trademark of an Argentine firm was the only touch of decoration on distempered walls. "Cozy," he repeated, suddenly eager to have done with it. A drink would go well.

He was a rotten human being but a good blackmailer. Thirty quid a week might be pitching it too high. Little fish were sweet, and he'd have to leave Ezral enough profit to encourage him to stay in business.

Marks assessed the shabby room. "Fifteen quid a week," he said briskly. "By rights I ought to fine you and your old woman for taking advantage of me and sneaking off like that. But I'm a fool—I'll stick with fifteen a week. Starting now." He snapped his fingers and opened his palm.

Ezral planted his hands on his thighs. "Sneaking off? You mean you were taking money before?" He stared at Marks, then off over his shoulder. "Of course!"

For an instant, Marks failed to identify the tearing noise—a sob.

"That doesn't help," he said uneasily. "Buck up, old lad. It's not the end of the world, just a business charge. Like insurance."

Ezral, gummy tears varnishing the savagely inflicted recent lines on his already care-worn face, wasn't listening. "Oh, Nettie . . . I never knew—she never told me."

"Leave off! You knew, all right! Hiding behind her skirts, too hoity-toity Lord Muck to show yourself!"

Harry Ezral rose, swaying. Smells came off him, of mothballs, sweat, cheap soap, and disinfectant. "She never told me," he repeated. "Never—rest her soul."

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Smudger Marks jumped off the chair as the last three words hit home. "She's dead? Here, hang about! I never touched her! I was inside—I can prove it." He started groping for his wallet.

"You killed her," Ezral contradicted him almost dreamily. "She didn't just die. Nettie killed herself. With sleeping tablets. And not a penny left in her poor little Post Office Savings book. All the time I was doing well she kept it up, putting away a few pounds at a time. I laughed at her over it. Teasing, like. She'd drawn the last fifteen pounds out the week before she—did it."

Marks heard a distant, squeaky, strangely slow voice: his own. "Listen, I wasn't to know. Let's be reasonable, eh? We'll just forget it—I won't be troubling you."

Ezral guffawed, a shocking sound that made spittle fly. "*Troubling* me? But you do trouble me, Smudger." His hands opened and shut, opened and shut, like things in an aquarium—blind, inhuman, yet sentient.

"Don't be a bloody fool, man! I was seen coming in here. Must have been. Look, listen—I know the score," Marks chattered. "You—" His throat dried and he swallowed desperately. "You do something silly, you'll never get away with it. *I was seen coming in here!* You'll never be able to get a—get me out without people noticing."

He giggled hysterically. "It's crazy—you're not going to—do anything. I know the score. I've done more time than you. That's what always catches 'em out, getting rid of the— Don't be silly, Mr. Ezral. Please. You don't want to go back inside."

Ezral considered that, and Marks, shirt damp, smelling his own acrid sweat, whimpered approval. "That's the way, mate. Cool down, think it through." Covertly, his right hand found the doorknob before he recalled Harry Ezral locking up, minutes earlier.

He licked his lips. Somehow he must introduce the subject of the key. But not yet.

"No, I don't want to go back in," Ezral said. "Not even for you."

Marks put the chair between them, a frail, ludicrous shield. "Of course not! You don't know your own strength, remember? Just take it easy and I'll get lost."

Harry Ezral's hands retained independent life. They rose blunderingly, in a horribly waterlogged manner. "You will that," he agreed thickly. "Oh, you will."

His nerves screaming, his lips so numb that the words jammed, Marks

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